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SEE PAGE 3

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Keeping Score

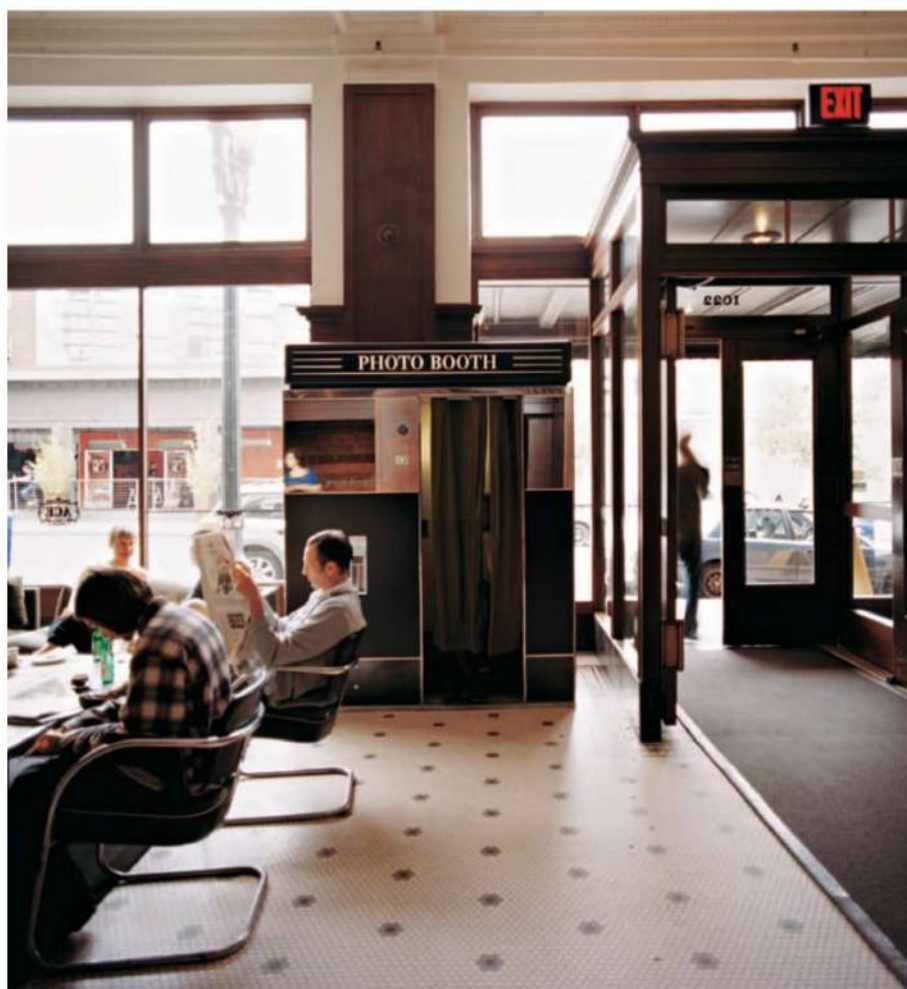
It's been six years since we inaugurated "Destinations Rated," our survey of iconic places around the world. This year we deployed 437 well-traveled experts to judge 133 destinations on six key criteria (see page 64). The surprise? The Norwegian Fjords were No. 1 in 2004 and remain so. And that year's bottom-dwelling Costa del Sol has, alas, failed to move out of the cellar. Tuscany scored a respectable 72—and is featured in *National Geographic Traveler: Italy*, a new online game where players take quizzes and navigate a map of Italy. You can find it at games.nationalgeographic.com. —KEITH BELLOWS, EDITOR

FEATURES

- 48 133 Places Rated**
In our sixth annual survey, discover where some of our most celebrated destinations rank, based on such factors as pollution, cultural authenticity, and tourism management. You may be surprised.
By Jay Walljasper

- 72 Portland Reigns**
In Oregon's self-proclaimed "city that works," eating, drinking, and getting around are at least three things you can do especially well.
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- 82 In Search of Magic**
The monarch butterfly's annual migration to Central Mexico's volcanic highlands inspires the writer's next novel.
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How unique is Portland's Ace Hotel? For starters, try out the vintage photo booth in the lobby (page 72). **On the cover:** Chile's Torres del Paine national park ranked high in our latest destinations survey (page 48). Photograph by Arco Images GmbH/Alamy.

OUR MISSION NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER reports on destinations of distinction and character, and we support efforts to keep them that way—believing that to enhance an authentic “sense of place” will benefit both travelers and the locations they visit.



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Puerto Vallarta is known as the festival and special events capital of Mexico, from cultural and religious festivals, to international sports tournaments, and the highly acclaimed International Gourmet Festival, there is a special event that's sure to appeal to every traveler, every season of the year.

Following is a guide to some of Puerto Vallarta's most popular events:

WHALE WATCHING SEASON



The whale watching season is in full swing every year from December to April. Humpback whales migrate to the area to breed, and you can watch them play in the calm waters of the bay. As many as 300

have been sighted here during just one season. The humpback is the species that breaches most frequently, up to once every 40 seconds for several minutes, making them easier to spot.

PUERTO VALLARTA'S BIRTHDAY



Puerto Vallarta's Birthday is celebrated with great fanfare on the 31st of May with a grand parade, free concerts along the Malecon and many other festivities. Don't miss the impressive fireworks display in the town's main square.

RESTAURANT WEEK



Puerto Vallarta is home to some of Mexico's finest restaurants, serving everything from regional Mexican cuisine to creative contemporary Mexican fare and the most varied international options.

You can sample some of the city's best cuisine during the last two weeks of May, when Puerto Vallarta's most renowned restaurants offer special three-course prix-fixe sampling menus with discounts up to 50% off regular a la carte prices.

SEA TURTLE SEASON



Participate in the protection and conservation of the Olive Ridley sea turtle, an endangered species. From June to November thousands of these turtles come to lay their eggs on the beaches of

Puerto Vallarta. Numerous local Hotels participate in a marine turtle conservation and protection program, with the help of a professional marine biologist.

MEXICO'S INDEPENDENCE DAY



Puerto Vallarta's main square and the Malecon come alive late at night on September 15, with the traditional cry for independence led by Puerto Vallarta's mayor. Live outdoor music shows as well as

spectacular fireworks displays follow, giving way to a full night of festivities before the Independence Day holiday.

INTERNATIONAL GOURMET FESTIVAL



In November of every year, Puerto Vallarta reigns as Mexico's capital of culinary arts, with the annual International Gourmet Festival. This ten-day celebration is a true feast for

the senses, featuring guest chefs from around the world. You can indulge in special tasting menus, and participate in cooking classes, and wine and tequila tastings.

VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE PROCESSIONS



Puerto Vallarta, like all of Mexico, celebrates with colorful processions in honor of Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Puerto Vallarta's church, a town landmark with its elaborate

crown, located across from the main square, is dedicated to her. The twelve-day long celebrations in December include traditional floats, and pre-Hispanic Aztec dancers chanting and praying. The celebrations end with an impressive fireworks display.

NAUTICAL FESTIVAL & BANDERAS BAY REGATTA



Puerto Vallarta's privileged location on Banderas Bay sets the stage for an entire month of nautical festivities throughout March. Many arts and musical programs, and a fishing tournament,

accompany the main nautical events. All proceeds raised from the festival are donated to non-profit organizations.



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Copenhagen colors, page 38.

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ON THE WEB

- traveler.nationalgeographic.com
- Site goes live October 22, 2009



Online Photo Gallery

See editor Keith Bellows's favorite *Traveler* photos from 2009, including Australia's Bondi Beach (above).

WorldWide Quiz: Think Pink

Put on your rose-colored glasses to answer these travel questions.

Plus: Map and More Photos

Click on a walking-tour map of Valparaíso, Chile; view photos of Portland, Oregon, and Copenhagen.

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A pro's take on a Highland Scot.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SASSIE BRIMBERG AND COTTON COUSIN/KENPRESS, SUSAN SEIBERT, JIM RICHARDSON, ANDREA RESCIGNO/ALAMY

Is it a coincidence that blackout dates fall during school vacations?



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Oahu Dinner Cruise ★ Savor a five-course lobster and prime rib dinner at your own private table as you watch the sunset along Oahu's Kahala coastline. Then sit back and enjoy classic Hawaiian dancing and entertainment.

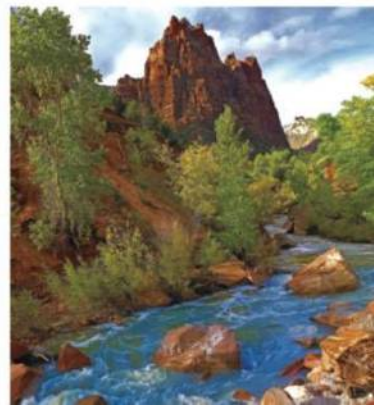
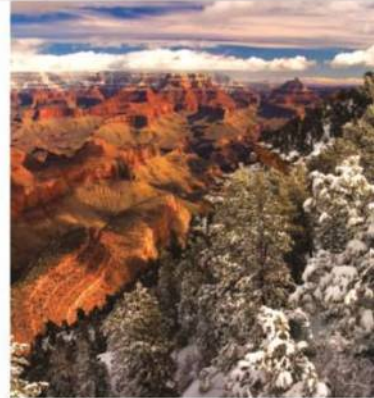
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Nashville's Grand Legends Tour ★ Nashville, the country music capital of the world, is the place to see all things related to music. From the Grand Ole Opry to Music Valley to the Willie Nelson Museum and the Wax Museum—this is the place (and the tour) that has it all!

New York City Holiday Lights Tour ★ Get in the festive mood by taking a three-hour, early-evening tour of Manhattan's glittering holiday-season lights. The place comes alive at night, and there is no better time to tour the illuminated city than during the holidays.

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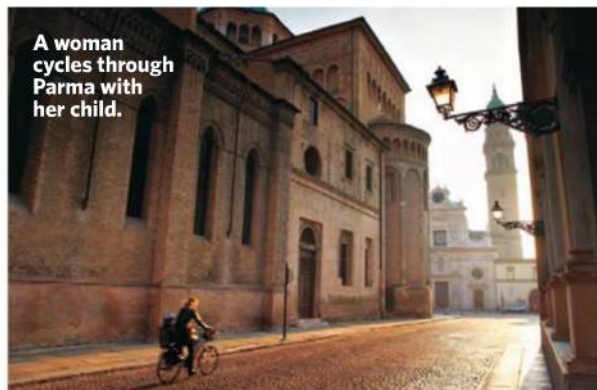
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TRAVEL TALK



A woman cycles through Parma with her child.

YOUR STORY

A memory can be an incredible gift

By LAURINE ALBERETTI LOMBARA

Visiting Parma, Italy, for a maternal family reunion, my brother and I explored the Castello di Goloso, an idyllic setting where my grandparents, two uncles, aunt, and mother had worked as millers. The grounds around the Castello are nestled at the base of the town of Varsi, in the shadow of Mount Dosso.

Here, my mother Laura met my father Antonio, who was back from his first foray to "l'America." Married at 19, Laura spent one year living in Varsi in 1928 with my paternal *nonna*, while Antonio returned to Boston to seek work, save money, and send for Laura.

Now, 81 years later, my brother and I gathered with our cousins in Italy to celebrate our shared love of family. After exploring the environs of Parma, reminiscing, feasting (of course, we were in the home of prosciutto and Parmigiano-

Reggiano), and exchanging photos and memories, our departure was due.

Before leaving, my cousin Fausto told me that he and his brother had gone to visit the mills where our parents worked. Wandering about the Castello, they were approached by an elderly man upset at their seeming trespass. Fausto gently explained their identity and purpose. Instantly, this man softened and excitedly asked in Italian, "Lauretta . . . what became of her?" Fausto related her life and death, and the elder sighed as he told how his parents and others often spoke of the beautiful Laura, who was held in such high esteem by all—so much so that his sister was named Laura in her honor. A magical reunion ended with this immeasurable gift.

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INBOX

Beg Your Parton

David Baum of Peterborough, New Hampshire, took issue with our Dolly Parton interview ("One-on-One," July/August 2009). "Pigeon Forge is a stunning example of unrestrained, run-amok development," he writes. "Her complete lack of accountability for the tragedy that threatens Great Smoky Mountains National Park is like a thief clucking about how sad it is that families are hurt by crime. What's next? Donald Trump being interviewed on how he 'saved' Atlantic City?" Editor **Keith Bellows** responds: "I have to agree that nearby Gatlinburg has been overdeveloped. But Dolly has done more to celebrate Appalachian authenticity in the face of miniature golf courses and franchise restaurants than anyone."

Taking the High Road

"The High Road to Machu Picchu" (May/June 2009) reminded **Victoria Samolyk** of Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, of her own trip 26 years ago. "We rode in the back of a pickup for five hours from Cusco to Mollepata, then headed up into the mountains toward

Salcantay pass. For four beautiful days we saw no other gringos. It was snowing lightly when we crossed the pass in the company of local women, bare-legged and wearing skirts, who prodded burdened donkeys over the high, rocky path. The Inca Trail did seem like a highway when we joined the dozens of other hikers for the final two days to Machu Picchu."

Take It Easy

"One shouldn't zoom through the Cotswolds!" admonished reader **Jackie Weist** of Cincinnati, Ohio, in response to "Waking the Sleeping Beauty," an account of a road trip through west-central England (September 2009). "It's a charming area perfect for ramblers, but in danger of being tarted up to attract the tourists." **Robert Gray** of Los Angeles, California, recommended one authentic stop west of the Cotswolds: "A tour of the Morgan Motor factory is a must. Rent a convertible there for a wonderful vintage motoring experience—at least on a sunny day."

Correction: Page 83 of our September issue misstated the site of Custer's Last Stand. It occurred in Montana at the Battle of Little Bighorn.

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SMART TRAVELER



Coming to America: Fast Trains

Plans are underway for a high-speed rail system in the U.S. Here's a preview. By JOHN ROSENTHAL

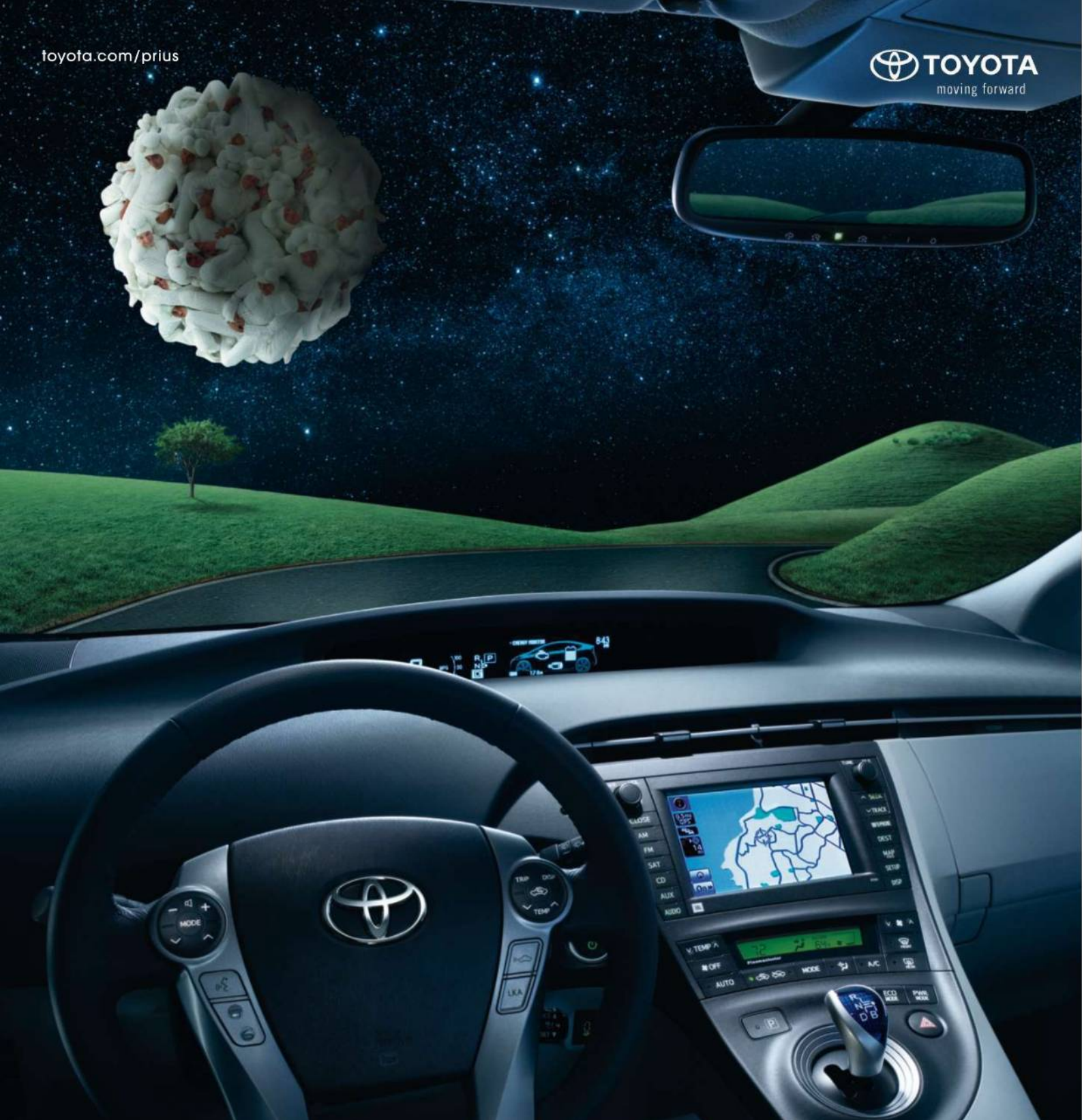
Imagine a trip from New Orleans to Atlanta that doesn't involve hours behind the wheel or long airport waits. Such an alternative is on the horizon. High-speed rail, for decades a workhorse of transportation systems in Europe and Asia, is on its way to becoming a reality in the United States. Within the next decade, passengers may be able to travel America by rail at speeds approaching 220 mph. ¶ At that clip, a train ride from Los Angeles to San Francisco will take just two hours and 40 minutes. That's half the time it takes to drive; it may also be faster than flying if you count the time it takes to go through security.

In hopes of alleviating air and highway congestion, the Department of Transportation has been mapping rail routes for decades. But those plans sat idling until a new administration built some political steam behind them.

President Obama has pledged to make a high-speed rail system a goal of his

Window to the future: Fast trains to Paris depart from London's St. Pancras station.

CATE GILSON/GETTY IMAGES



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administration, much like the Interstate Highway system remains a legacy of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency. "It's time for America to have high-speed rail," says Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "We're going to make it happen."

Unlike the Interstate Highway system, which traverses every state (even Alaska and Hawaii), high-speed rail won't reach every corner of the country. Instead, the plan envisions ten discrete new "corridors" of cities that are 100 to 600 miles apart. One links Tampa, Orlando, and Miami; another would connect San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Little Rock (see map).

The goal is not to eliminate air or highway traffic among these cities, but to ease it. Neither the auto industry nor the airlines oppose the plan. High-speed rail carries environmental dividends. Rail is already the cleanest and most energy-efficient way to travel, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. The nation's existing intercity trains consume one-third less energy per passenger mile than automobiles. The proposed rail network could reduce CO₂ emissions by



about six billion pounds annually.

Another benefit is increased energy independence. Transportation currently accounts for 70 percent of U.S. oil consumption. Shifting hundreds of millions of passenger trips from petroleum-fueled cars and airplanes to electric trains could dramatically reduce the nation's dependence on imported oil.

But the primary reason that high-speed rail has finally been fast-tracked is

to generate employment. The 2009 economic stimulus bill includes \$8 billion for states to create high-skill jobs in railway construction, engineering, and manufacturing. "High-speed rail fits in very well with plans to jump-start regional economies and put people to work building the infrastructure, laying the tracks, and making the cars," LaHood says.

The government will start doling out stimulus funds for "shovel-ready"

INTERNATIONAL MAPPING. SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



GOOD ADVICE

Ride A Fast Train Now

The closest thing to high-speed rail service in the U.S. is Amtrak's Acela train, which averages just 80 mph between Boston and Washington, D.C. For faster service, you need to go to Europe or Asia. Here are some of the places to ride the rails at blinding speed.

■ **JAPAN** Originally built for the 1964 Olympics, Japan's **Shinkansen** (a.k.a. Bullet) trains travel at speeds up to 186 mph and cover a network of more than 1,350 miles. Japan is already making plans to increase train speeds to 310 mph by 2025.

■ **FRANCE** The **Train à Grand Vitesse** (TGV) opened in 1981, connecting Paris to the rest of France with fast, reliable train service. Nearly 100 million passengers use the TGV annually, and why not? The 429-mile trip

from Paris to Avignon takes just 156 minutes. In 2008, the **Automotrice à Grand Vitesse** (AGV) debuted, with trains capable of traveling up to 223 mph.

■ **SPAIN** Because Spain was a more recent convert to high-speed rail, it holds valuable lessons for the United States. "They were not dissuaded by people saying it's too expensive," says Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who toured Spain's **AVE** high-speed rail network in May. The Málaga to



Fast train in the Netherlands.

Barcelona network encompasses more than 1,000 miles. Plans are to expand the rail system to more than 6,000 miles by 2020.

■ **TAIWAN** Built largely with private sector funds at a cost of \$18 billion, Taiwan's high-speed rail has been an enormous success, carrying more than five million passengers since it opened in 2007. Taiwan's

mountainous terrain makes the 221-mile trip between Taipei and Kaohsiung a five-hour trip by car but just 90 minutes by train.

■ **ITALY** The first European country to offer high-speed rail, Italy hasn't expanded much since 1978, when it linked Rome and Florence. **Eurostar AV Fast** trains now connect Rome to Naples (142 miles) in 81 minutes. —J.R.

projects in the very near future. But experts agree that because there's no requirement to spend the money exclusively on high-speed projects, much of it will initially pay for upgrades to signals,

tracks, and rail cars to improve average speeds on existing routes. As a result, it will still be years, maybe decades, before most Americans can ride the kind of bullet trains seen abroad.

Ironically, it's car-loving California that is likely to be the first U.S. proving ground for high-speed rail. The state created its High-Speed Rail Authority in 1996 and

(Continued on page 25)

THAT'S

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DULY NOTED

Innovative Designs Can Help Fliers

Making the most of the vertical space on a jumbo jet first occurred to Emil Jacob when, in a desperate bid for sleep on a long-haul flight, he stretched out on the cabin floor. "I looked up and realized that there was all this space not being used." The Cambridge, Mass., designer later developed the "step-seat principle," which involves elevating alternate rows of seats by seven inches, giving passengers more room to recline with space beneath the seats for carry-on bags. A business-class version features stacked seating—think bunk beds—so passengers can lie flat. The concept has generated some buzz in the industry, but so far no takers. Other cabin comfort innovations include an armrest shaped like a vertical paper clip that allows seatmates to stake out equal elbow room. These solutions could be implemented at a reasonable cost without sacrificing the number of seats per cabin, so what's the airline industry waiting for?

—MARGARET LOFTUS

EXPERT OPINION

The World in a Tea Cup

The global tea renaissance is in full bloom—just don't call it the new coffee. Bruce Richardson, co-author of The New Tea Companion: A Guide to Teas Throughout the World, explains the desire for and pursuit of Camellia sinensis.

■ **MEDITATION IN A CUP** The small rituals of preparing and enjoying tea soothe and slow us down; it's the antithesis of grabbing a grande cappuccino on the go. Tea is also a welcoming gesture across cultures. "Wherever you travel, people will put a cup of tea in your hand." ■ **THE BASICS** American consumers used to be happy with a simple tea bag, but now they want loose, gourmet tea, from delicate white teas from China's Fujian province to rich blends of black tea from Kenya. Water temperature, brewing times, teapots, and ceremonial presentation vary. ■ **URBAN TEA ROOMS** There's a tearoom to suit every taste. Devotees can search and read user-submitted reviews on sites such as www.teaguide.net. In London, tea at the Wolseley in Piccadilly is less expensive and more informal than some competitors. Ladurée in Paris is "tea and macaroon heaven." Teance in Berkeley, Calif., offers tastings, and owner Winnie Yu shares her expertise in Far East teas. ■ **PLANTATION IMMERSION** Intrepid connoisseurs can develop their palates while relaxing in picturesque plantations. India's Darjeeling region produces the champagne of teas. Already a top tea exporting country, Sri Lanka is poised to become the new tea tourism hotspot now that its protracted civil war is over. To sample estate life closer to home, tour the Charleston Tea Plantation in South Carolina, the only commercially operated tea plantation in the continental U.S.



Tea tasting in Darjeeling, India.

—LINDA BURBANK

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

How to Avoid Surcharges on a Car Rental

These are difficult times for car rental companies. And guess on whom they're leaning for a little help? That's right: you. If you rent a car, you may have to pay for insurance you never meant to buy. Or a late fee. Or even an early-return fee. Watch for new extras, too, like fees to change a reservation.



tion, charges for vehicle licensing and tire disposal, and creative new fees that even the companies have difficulty explaining. Here's how to avoid these surcharges. ■ **Get a total price.** Websites such as Travelocity promise a "total" price on a car rental that includes any required fees and taxes. Or try booking your rental on so-called "opaque" sites (in which you don't know the identity of the supplier until after you've committed to buy) such as Hotwire.com and Priceline.com, which require you to prepay the rental. You get a voucher that covers all taxes and mandatory surcharges. ■ **Call your auto insurance company.** The biggest car rental "gotcha" is its highly profitable insurance. Find out if your auto policy has primary coverage for car rentals. (Secondary coverage only picks up the tab

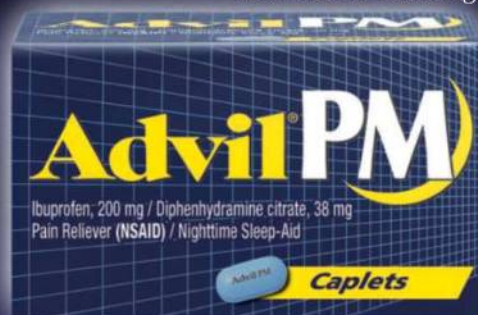
for expenses after your insurance claim has been paid.) Some credit cards, such as Diners Club, also offer primary coverage. ■ **Read the contract.** A common car rental agent trick is to slip a printout under your nose when you're in a hurry, urging you to "sign here, and initial here and here." Another issue: non-English contracts (request a translation). ■ **Review the final bill.** Car rental companies often add items to your bill at the end of your rental—sometimes intentionally, sometimes not; correct such mistakes before you return the keys. ■ **Monitor your credit card.** The company may agree to adjust your bill, but make sure it actually follows through. If you see a suspicious charge, call the car rental company, and if it balks, file a dispute of the erroneous credit card charges. —CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT



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Customer Disservice

When a reader's Internet phone account is hacked, the company shows little interest in helping him. **By CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT**

I recently spent six months in São Paulo, and I used Skype [a service that allows you to make free or cheap phone calls through the Internet] to stay in touch with friends and family. Recently, when I tried to sign in, my password was rejected. It turns out my account had been hijacked. ¶ There is no easy way to get in touch with the company—no phone number, no e-mail address, only a support form. I received an unhelpful form letter days later and immediately responded via e-mail, trying to highlight the urgency of the

matter. Then my credit-card company phoned, saying there were four suspicious charges of \$13 each from Skype. I can't get through to the company. Can you help? —A. Verstraete, Chicago, Ill.

A: Sending you a form letter when your account was obviously hacked is like throwing a drowning man a rubber duckie. Skype should have escalated your complaint to the right department immediately.

When I investigated, I found numerous mentions of similar problems with Skype—fraudulent activity on an account, an inappropriate form answer by the company, or even a lack of response. In Skype's defense, there's evidence that the company is trying to beef up its fraud detection capabilities.

Still, when it comes to reporting account problems, the Skype website is profoundly unhelpful. I'm left with the impression that Skype doesn't want to hear from its customers. Ironic, considering that it's in the communication business.

But it's hardly alone. Other travel companies have built virtual fortresses around them-

selves, which force most of their customer inquiries that can't be answered with a "frequently asked questions" section to be routed through forms that are typically answered with pre-written stock responses. Maybe that's why one survey found only one in three travelers found travel websites do a good job.

According to Skype, your password was harvested through what's called a "key-stroke logger"—a program that records your keystrokes and sends them to a hacker. (In fact, your account had more than 1,000 calls logged to every continent but Antarctica.) An agent contacted you, restored your account, and credited you the \$52 that had been charged to your credit card.

Trip Troubles?

Maybe we can help. E-mail us the details at elliott@ngs.org.



Lesson Learned: Keep antivirus software updated and avoid using a shared computer—such as in a hotel or airport, which can be infected—when signing in to Skype and password-protected websites, such as your bank's.



The Real Deal

Mexico's Riviera Maya

Travel cognoscenti looking for a truer tropical immersion fly into Cancún but don't stay there. They head south into the **Riviera Maya**, Mexico's 81-mile Caribbean coast, punctuated by palms and trimmed by fine sand. Resorts are smaller and more spread out—a boon for those seeking hideaway beaches.

GET ORIENTED New developments are springing up every month, so even old timers may confuse **Xpu Ha** and **Xel-Ha**, or **Maroma** and **Mayakoba**. Get the lay of the land and find hidden beaches with maps sold by Can-Do Travel Guides (www.cancunmap.com).

PICK YOUR LANDING The various resort areas have different personalities. A few, such as **Puerto Morelos**, have a traditional Mexican fishing village vibe, while in other areas the best beaches are fronted by large developments; for example, the 2,000-room **Iberostar** complex is a mini-city complete with a shopping arcade, convention center, and faux Mayan pyramid.

ON THE GRID Playa del Carmen, better known simply as "Playa," is Mexico's fastest-growing city and the hub of the Riviera Maya—moderate-to-inexpensive lodging and dining is plentiful. Although most hotels are not beachfront, Playa is ideal for car-free visitors who still want to be connected to the world outside the resort.

BEYOND THE BEACH The sand stars in this show, but there are other diversions. The roster of impressive ruins is led by **Tulum**, the only Mayan city built right on the coast, while the temple-pyramids of oft-overlooked **Cobá** are 30 miles inland. The **Yucatán Peninsula** is riddled with spectacular cenotes (sinkholes), linked by miles of clear water; superb snorkeling and diving is found on **Cozumel**, a half-hour ferry ride from Playa. The 1.3-million-acre **Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve** south of Tulum is a national park and UNESCO World Heritage site. —DAVID SWANSON

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Galápagos Land Tortoise- Kleintours



Diving-Peter Lange

Galápagos

About 625 miles off the Ecuadorian mainland, is located this famously isolated archipelago that comprises 13 major islands (5 inhabited) and over 100 smaller islands and islets. The Galápagos Islands have been designated a National Park, a Marine Reserve, and a Natural World Heritage Site - a protected place with some of the highest levels of endemism (species found nowhere else) on Earth. Charles Darwin dedicated years of studying flora and fauna in the Galápagos Islands, collecting their pivotal

evidence for his theory of evolution. He was also enchanted by the pleasant weather all year round, in addition to some of the most hauntingly beautiful landscapes to be found anywhere else.

After 200 years of Darwin's first visit, the Galápagos Islands still offer the intact natural charm, but now mixed with snug accommodations for adventure or relaxation for all visitors' needs.

Galapagos, Nature at its purest, is a natural wonder that takes the heart of everyone who visits this seductive archipelago.



Bahía de Caráquez - F. Caizapanta



Guayaquil City - C. Viera

Pacific Coast



Surf in Canoa Beach - F. Caizapanta

The Ecuadorian coast it's a living collage made of green mangrove forests, crystal clear surf waters, sugary beaches, quaint fishing villages, and modern cities. The City of Guayaquil has experienced the largest and fastest urban renewal process in Latin America, which is why the United Nations declared it a *Model City of Human Development*. Visitors will also want to check out the Spondylus Route, an ancient trade route named for a once-treasured shell found along

the Ecuadorian coast. Besides beautiful beaches, this route offers fascinating archaeological sites as well as surfing, paragliding, and much more for nature and adventure lovers.

The sun, the typical sea food, the sea sports, and the vibrant night life together with the warmth and hospitality of its people are ready to welcome travelers from around the world!

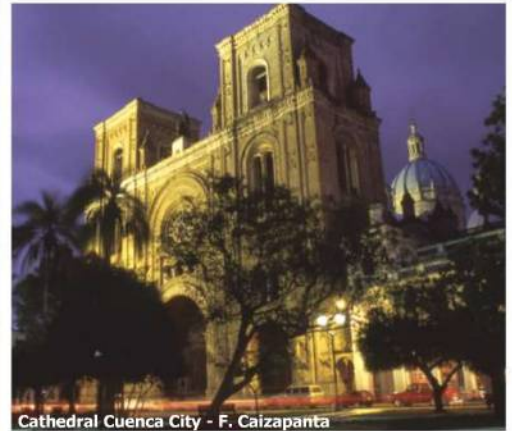
Straddling the Equator in Southwest South America, Ecuador is more than a small world - it's four worlds in one, with dazzling scenery and astounding biodiversity. Add to these a compact size and a modern infrastructure, and you've got four worlds you can experience in one glorious trip.



Casa de la Música, Quito - R. Salas



Cotopaxi National Park - Quito Visitors' Bureau



Cathedral Cuenca City - F. Caizapanta



From the coast, you'll soon be able to hop aboard the "Train of the Middle of the World" for the scenic trip to the Andean Highlands - probably the most visited area of Ecuador, and it's not difficult to see why. This breathtaking, multi-hued mountain paradise is jam-packed with a cultural and natural diversity that brings many visitors back, time and time again. It is also home to the country's widest range of accommodations, marvelous restaurants, shopping centers, and countless lively, fascinating festivals most very easily

accessible from the modern Ecuadorian capital, Quito - the world's first city to be declared a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. In the southern Andes, is the colonial city of Cuenca, another UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, with its charming cobblestone streets and whitewashed red-tiled buildings, stately plazas and grand old churches. Cuenca also boasts an appealing youthful, modern flair in its restaurants, galleries and nightlife.

The Andes' Avenue of Volcanoes, Latin-American modernity with popular festivities and indigenous markets inspire travelers around the world!



Añangu Lagoon - F. Rivadeneira



Trekking - Kapawi Ecolodge



Meetings & Events - Kapawi Ecolodge

An eco-adventurer's dream come true, Ecuador's Amazon region is unforgettably beautiful. In all of South America, Ecuador provides the richest and easiest access to the Amazon. Ecuador is also home to 10% of the world's plant species, including 2,725 of orchid species identified in the area. Besides, several indigenous ethnic groups coexist side by side while still observing their original traditions and distinct customs. Visitors are made to feel equally at home, whether

they are communing with local people or relaxing in the comfort of hotels and lodges of all sorts, boasting three-course meals and hot showers.

The Ecuadorian Amazon is easy to access, it is magic and it is full of many lifeforms that make travelers from all over the world fall in love with the region.



Life at its purest

Vaccinate Your Trip

With the prospect of swine flu roiling travel plans, travel insurance may provide needed protection. By MARGARET LOFTUS

Just how the swine flu pandemic will play out this winter is still anybody's guess, but health officials warn that between swine flu, or H1N1, and the seasonal strain, we're in for an intense flu season. And while the Centers for Disease Control haven't recommended any travel warnings as of press time, the pandemic has the potential to—at the very least—inconvenience travelers, especially during the holidays. As a result, more consumers are hedging their bets against getting sick, quarantined, or otherwise prevented from traveling by buying trip cancellation

A traveler returns to the U.S. from Mexico, source of this year's swine flu outbreak.



insurance. "Going on a trip is a sizable investment," says Ed Walker, immediate past president of the U.S. Travel Insurance Association. "There's a heightened awareness of things going on in the world

and that creates uncertainty."

Fueling that uncertainty is the unpredictable nature of influenza. The H1N1 strain could mutate into a more severe illness or evolve into an even milder version. So far, the germ's distinguishing feature has been its tendency to affect people who aren't normally at risk for seasonal flu: More than half of the confirmed and probable sufferers are under the age of 25.

For a minimal premium determined by the price of your trip and your age, trip cancellation insurance will reimburse the cost of your vacation in case you're unable to travel for reasons specified in the policy. Not all the fine print is the same, however. In fact,

BRENNAN UNSTEAD/AP IMAGES

Welcome to Kendall

FROM THE BEST LAND COMES

some policies have provisions that exclude coverage of pandemics. Shop for policies that cover any illness for you or family members. Note that claims almost always require proof. "[The burden] is going to be on the traveler to get it," says Linda McGee, president of MEDEX, a Baltimore-based travel insurance company.

But getting sick isn't the only way to scuttle a trip. Make sure your policy covers trip interruption. Last summer, some airline passengers to China and Turkey were quarantined for days thanks to a feverish few suspected of harboring swine flu. Airlines in the U.S. also have the right to deny boarding to any passenger they suspect of having a communicable disease.

For the most flexibility, purchase a policy that allows you to cancel travel for any reason. It'll cost more, but you'll have the option of postponing a vacation to a country that may be experiencing an intense outbreak or where you wouldn't feel comfortable with the level of medical care available in the event of becoming ill.

FAST TRAINS

(Continued from page 17)

has been busily planning and conducting engineering and environmental impact studies ever since. In November 2008, Golden State voters approved \$9 billion in bonds for a high-speed rail network that will ultimately run from San Diego all the way to Sacramento.

Judge Quentin L. Kopp, chairman of California's High-Speed Rail Authority, hopes California's current fiscal woes won't crimp its ambitions, since only \$138 million of the \$9 billion is projected to be spent this year and next. He says construction could begin as early as 2011 on the legs linking Los Angeles to Anaheim and San Francisco to San Jose.

The price tag for California's system is estimated at a whopping \$45 billion. Costs for the other nine corridors are harder to pin down because so many factors are involved. The Chicago corridor, for example, requires the coordination of nine Midwestern states.

James P. RePass, president of the National Corridors Initiative, a non-profit that advocates for increased rail

infrastructure, says a ballpark estimate for the U.S. system is the \$248 billion that China has budgeted for its high-speed rail system. That's a staggering figure. The \$1 billion per year allocated in Obama's budgets for 2010 to 2014 won't begin to cover it.

Therein lies the problem, says Adrian Moore, vice president of research at the Reason Foundation, a Los Angeles-based think tank, who calls high-speed rail a sensible idea in theory but a boondoggle in practice. "In the U.S., there's no way for trains to carry the numbers of people needed to compete with flying or driving," he maintains. "You're going to spend a lot of money to carry very few people."

But for RePass, the question isn't whether we can afford to invest in high-speed rail; it's whether we can afford not to. "For what it produces, high-speed rail is a bargain," he says. "It enables commerce and development, and it grows the pool of available employees and employers that can access each other."

He's quick to add: "Interstate highways are very expensive, too, but we find ways to pay for them."

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-Jackson Country.

THE BEST WINE

KENDALL-JACKSON

ONE ON ONE

By Keith Bellows

A Master Storyteller

From desert marathons to mountain treks, he goes where the adrenaline flows.

Like many of you, I have roamed the world vicariously with Boyd Matson for the past 30 years. One of the great adventure journalists of our day, Matson has suffered dehydration, broken bones, snakebite, and countless other misfortunes in his pursuit of stories—and usually comes up laughing. Most people know him as the longtime host of the acclaimed series *National Geographic Explorer*. Before that, he worked on some of the country's top news shows, including ABC's *World News Now* and *The Today Show* on NBC. Currently, he hosts *Wild Chronicles* on PBS

and the radio program *National Geographic Weekend*. And lucky for us, for the past two years he's written "Unbound," his highly popular column for *Traveler*. I managed to sit him down for a few minutes before he jetted off to his next adventure.

What is it about travel that you love? I've been addicted to travel since I was a kid. The books that interested me when I was young were about explorers and other parts of the world. I thought I would like to go and find out more about those places. I read a book about Sun Yat-sen in China and a book about a missionary's experience in New Guinea. I thought, I have to get to China and New Guinea to see what they're like. I wanted to see them firsthand. I still read other people's travel writings and say, "Well, I have to get there and see it for myself."

How much time do you spend on the road in a typical year? Probably a third of the time. I try not to keep an accurate count because then I would have to confess to my wife. When I worked for NBC News years ago, for *The Today Show*, I traveled half the time

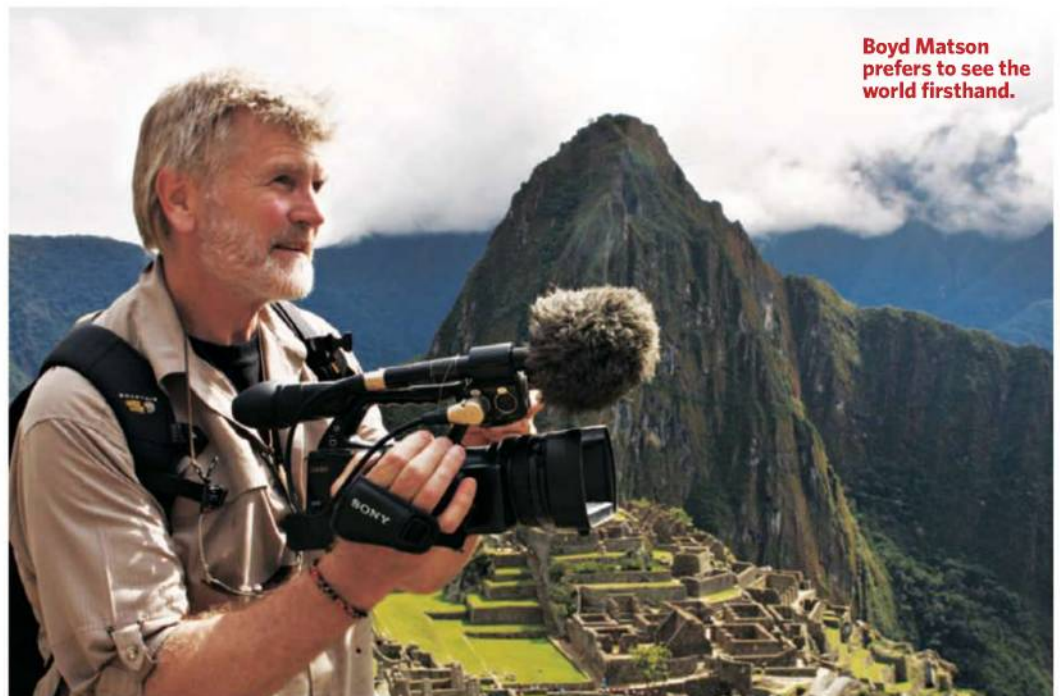
or more. I was single then. I was the only correspondent who would have laundry bills the first day on the road, because I took all my dirty laundry with me. I knew by traveling I would get my laundry done and have a clean bed at night and a decent meal, something I didn't get at home.

We think of you as an explorer, but what about travel here at home? I traveled a lot as a kid in the United States, going on

driving vacations with my parents. I still like driving the back roads of America, seeing the rural places. When I could drive myself, I would stop at all the places that my parents wouldn't let me stop because they were always in a hurry to get someplace. I wanted the journey; they wanted the destination. I did driving trips for *The Today Show* and briefly at National Geographic. I took my '63 red Cadillac convertible with tail fins and drove around the country doing stories.

What has traveling with your own kids taught you about travel? I enjoy taking my kids to someplace that was a special moment for me, because I want to look at it again through their eyes. I did this at Machu Picchu. As we got to the place where they could just begin to see the ruins, I had them close their eyes. Then I led them to a spot with a full view of the

(Continued on page 30)

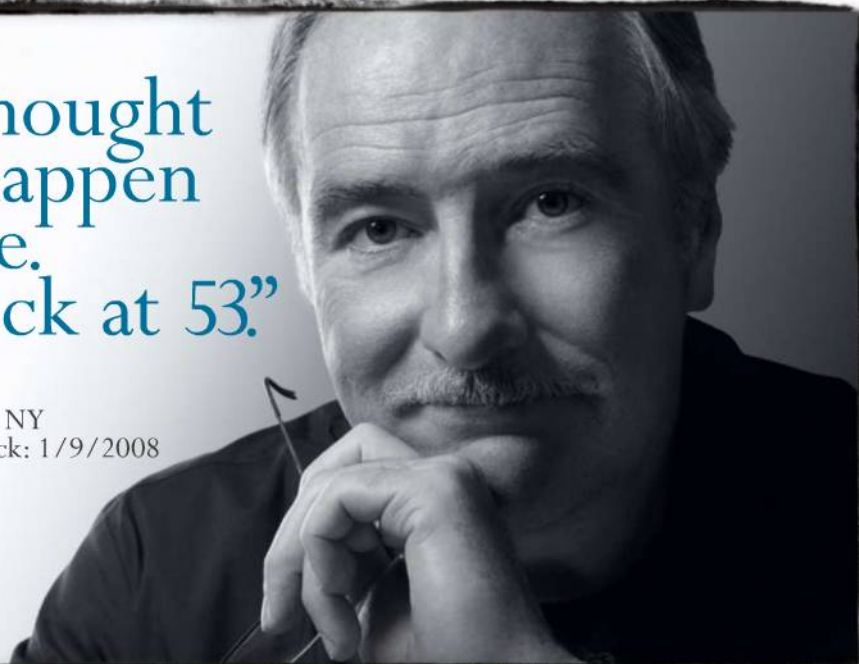


**Boyd Matson
prefers to see the
world firsthand.**

ERICA MATSON

**“I never thought
it could happen
to me.
A heart attack at 53.”**

~Steve A.
New York, NY
Heart attack: 1/9/2008



“I had been feeling fine. But turns out my cholesterol and other risk factors* increased my chance of a heart attack. Now I trust my heart to Lipitor. Talk to your doctor about your risk and about Lipitor.”

- Adding Lipitor may help, when diet and exercise are not enough. Unlike some other cholesterol-lowering medications, Lipitor is FDA-approved to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in patients with several common risk factors, including family history, high blood pressure, low good cholesterol, age and smoking.
- Lipitor has been extensively studied with over 16 years of research. And Lipitor is backed by 400 ongoing or completed clinical studies.

*Patient's risk factors include age, gender, smoking, and high blood pressure.

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine that is used along with a low-fat diet. It lowers the LDL (“bad” cholesterol) and triglycerides in your blood. It can raise your HDL (“good” cholesterol) as well. LIPITOR can lower the risk for heart attack, stroke, certain types of heart surgery, and chest pain in patients who have heart disease or risk factors for heart disease such as age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL, or family history of early heart disease.

LIPITOR can lower the risk for heart attack or stroke in patients with diabetes and risk factors such as diabetic eye or kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:
LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with

liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant.

If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all medications you take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose.

Common side effects are diarrhea, upset stomach, muscle and joint pain, and changes in some blood tests.

Please see additional important information on next page.



Have a heart to heart with your doctor about your risk. And about Lipitor.

Call 1-888-LIPITOR (1-888-547-4867) or visit www.lipitor.com/steve

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA.

Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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IMPORTANT FACTS



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atorvastatin calcium
tablets

(LIP-ih-tore)

LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

With the help of your doctor and a cholesterol-lowering medicine like LIPITOR, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your cholesterol.

Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:

- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:

- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack, stroke, certain types of heart surgery, and chest pain in patients who have heart disease or risk factors for heart disease such as:

- age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-C, family history of early heart disease

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients with diabetes and risk factors such as diabetic eye or kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems.** Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Call your doctor right away if you have:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Allergic reactions including swelling of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat that may cause difficulty in breathing or swallowing which may require treatment right away
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow
- Allergic skin reactions

Common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Diarrhea
- Muscle and joint pain
- Upset stomach
- Changes in some blood tests

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:

- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
- Talk to your pharmacist.
- Go to www.lipitor.com or call 1-888-LIPITOR.

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Rx only

By Daisann McLane

Gung ho for Group Travel

Can a (shudder) package tour actually deliver an authentic travel experience?

At 6:30 on a Sunday morning I stood in an alley in Guangzhou, China, wearing a bright orange baseball cap. I look really dumb in baseball caps, and orange is my worst color. But my new friend, Mrs. Chu, stuck it on my head with a warning: “You must keep this on so the bus driver and the tour leader can see you easily. Otherwise they may drive off without you! Do you want to be left behind in Jiangmen or Chikan?” ¶ My tour group and I, all 50-odd of us, were waiting expectantly in the alley, munching on the free breakfast provided by the travel agency—a box of soy milk and a

puffy white pork bun sealed in cellophane. I would have killed for a coffee, but I knew that at this hour, in a tea-drinking country, I could forget about it. A bus idled at the curb, spewing thick exhaust fumes into the smoggy air of this ancient city once known as Canton, now dubbed the capital of “China’s world factory.”

The tour leader blew her whistle sharply. The bus doors swung open, and we all pressed forward, scrambling for a seat. Soon I was settling into mine—and into my new role as a “Chinese” tourist.

With China’s economy booming, the Chinese have transformed themselves into tourists. China’s tourism board estimates that Chinese citizens took more than 1.8 billion domestic trips in 2009. So when I signed on for a Chinese bus tour last winter, I wasn’t just going on a day trip. I was joining the world’s largest travel community.

As I sat on a bus wearing a silly cap, eating pork buns, and being serenaded by a karaoke-singing tour guide, I had to laugh at myself. Not that many years ago I was so allergic to anything remotely “touristy” that I even refused to carry a camera when I traveled. I kept a list of “not for me” places—popular attractions, neighborhoods, even nations, that I refused to visit because I thought they’d be “too full of tourists.” I considered myself a class apart, a *traveler*, and that meant going places nobody else did, and going, mostly, alone. Tour groups? No way.

Then one summer I was in Slovenia,

figuring out what to do with an empty week before my flight back to the U.S. The travel agent at my hotel offered me the last space in a charter group leaving the next day for a mass-market sea resort on a Croatian island. The word “group” made me nervous, but the deal was too sweet to pass up: airfare and a week of hotel and meals for only \$200, all-inclusive. I figured if it was awful, I’d bail and still come out ahead on the airfare.

Then I hooked up with Mila, a Slovenian filmmaker who took me under her wing when she saw me, the lone American among a hundred Slovenes, waiting for the charter flight. Mila introduced me to Vlado and Marija and Andrej, and pretty soon I forgot I was on a package tour and got into the Slovenian tourist swing. In the cafés of Brac island, I learned the refrains to old folk songs (one of our fellow tourists, it turns out, was the “Slovenian Bob Dylan”) and how to sling back shots of *slivovitz*, the local firewater. During long afternoons on a pebbly Adriatic beach I got a crash course in the twists of turbulent post-Yugoslavia politics.

“It is not so bad to be tourist, is it?” asked Mila, laughing, at the end of one of those perfect afternoons. She had a point. This trip with the group was more enjoyable—and culturally enlightening—than my earlier, carefully researched solo forays to the area.

My stint on a Slovenian charter holiday

My week with the charter group was more enjoyable than my carefully researched solo forays to the area.



Hats off to group trips with locals, which can lead to fun experiences.

(Continued from page 26)

ruins and had them open their eyes on the count of three. It's that moment of shock that you like to see. Traveling with kids also helps you open your eyes to look at things in a different way. When they were younger, I gave one of my kids a still camera and one a video camera. It was fun to compare their shots to my own and see how they saw things in a slightly different way. It made me think, "I should have seen that."

Do you think the next generation is going to travel differently? Oh sure. The big difference is technology. It's made travel seem less strange and intimidating. There's far more communication. I remember trying to call home from the Amazon years ago. We got to this small clearing where a few people lived, and there was a hut with a radio that linked into a phone line somewhere. When I called home, I was given a lecture about several problems that had happened. I finally said, "You realize that this is going out over a radio signal that everyone in the Amazon can now hear." Back then when you traveled, you might not hear from home for two weeks, or if you needed to get money it was not easy to do. Today, there's more security in travel. There's also more opportunity and willingness for young people to travel. In high school they have study abroad and exchange programs, and in college lots of kids now do at least a semester abroad.

Do you think we can avoid doing long-term damage to some of the great travel icons? I'm optimistic that people increasingly are aware that we have to do something, and I see small changes. Unfortunately, I also see places with irreparable damages. I was hiking around the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens near Luxor, Egypt, and I saw a ravine filled with trash. That was where they were dumping the tourist garbage. Conservationist Mike Fay and I were on a beach in Gabon that was littered with trash. Mike would pick it up and read where it was from. It came out of the river system from two countries away. People threw it in the river, and it disappeared, so they thought it was not a problem. Well, hey, it's washing up on somebody's beach.

If you could pick three people to travel with, living or dead, who would they be? First would be polar explorer Ernest Shackleton, because of his leadership

skills and ability to keep spirits up. I'm confident he would find a way to get us out of any scrape alive, and he'd also have some great stories to tell. I'd also pick conservation biologist George Schaller. He's done pioneering work in field biology on so many different animal species that I would like to look at wildlife through his eyes. Finally I'd go with Bonnie Raitt. I think mixed gender expeditions are better, and there's nothing like some good music, especially the blues, at the end of the day to make you forget about your troubles. Also, music is a good way to connect with and communicate with people of other cultures.

What is your most memorable travel experience? One of the greatest experiences of my life was the trip to Khumbu Icefall on Mount Everest. At base camp, I met Babu Chiri, who at that time was the most famous climbing Sherpa. He had the speed record from base camp to summit—16 hours and 56 minutes. Unfortunately, while we were there, Babu Chiri stepped into a crevasse at Camp II and was killed. I remember thinking as I stood in the icefall on a beautiful sunny day that it looked like Superman's crystal palace, that this was the most wonderful spot I'd ever been. And then the next day, the best-known Sherpa climber in the world was killed on this same mountain. It shows that while travel is a lot of fun, there are risks involved sometimes. You have to be careful but enjoy it while you're there.

What is your travel philosophy? I want to go to new places in a way that gives me a better experience, not to go as an observer but as a participant. That just happened in Fez, Morocco, where this kid came up to me in the old market wanting to be my guide. I followed along to see what would happen. He was of Berber descent, and he took me to his house, which had four stories. He said, "This is where the Berbers lived in this old market." He introduced me to his sister and his mother, who was in the kitchen baking bread. She gave me some bread and made tea for me. The boy wanted me to come back and have dinner. He said, "We have an extra bedroom. You want to come and stay here?" It just proved that if you don't take a few chances, you really never get to enjoy the trip. So I guess that is my philosophy of travel: Get off the tour bus.

Keith Bellows is the editor of Traveler.

forced me to reconsider what had been, till then, one of my basic assumptions about travel: that one should never, under any circumstance, be a "tourist." Playing tourist on another culture's bus is, in fact, a real treat. To experience a place with the people who know it best is about as authentic as travel gets. And it's lots of fun, too.

I'm not about to abandon my solo travels for a lifetime of following guides with bright yellow flags. But now when I travel, especially to countries where tourism is a big part of the culture, I consider putting in time on the bus. During my last trip to Japan I ignored guidebook warnings that Hakone hot springs was touristy, and went.

I'm glad I did, for I would have missed a charming weekend among hundreds of happy Japanese following the well-worn Hakone circuit of walks, cable car rides, and dips in sizzling pools. Trailing alongside families negotiating the steaming paths in the volcanic Owakudani area, I ate the famous black eggs boiled in the sulfurous pools. At each attraction I scoured the gift shop for the best Astro Boy mug, the most perfect Hello Kitty key chain. And, of course, I took pictures of everything and everyone. My tourist day in Hakone was every bit as authentic a Japanese experience to me as a stay in a traditional Kyoto *ryokan*.

The day on the Chinese bus? Well, to be perfectly honest, it had its ups and downs. The unbelievably cheap price for these tours—\$7 for transportation, a guide, and a free lunch—is offset by the commissions from the many roadside stands that the bus stops at along the way. Even without the orange cap I need not have worried about being forgotten in Jiangmen, or Chikan, or at the factory that processed a rare fungus used in medicinal soups. The bus driver waited patiently until every last passenger had purchased something—a handful of sweet dried plums, a brown paper bag filled with farm-fresh cashews. As a result, by the time we reached our tour's advertised destination we had no time left to explore. Stuffed with nuts and sweets, half asleep under our heaps of red plastic bags, few of us cared.

"It was a very good trip," proclaimed Mrs. Chu as we staggered, 12 hours later, back into Guangzhou. "These tours are such a wonderful way to see China."

"Yes, Mrs. Chu," this "Chinese" tourist agreed, "they certainly are."

Contributing editor **Daisann McLane** sheds light on local ways in distant lands on her blog, www.therealtravelblog.com.

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HOTEL CENTRAL



My House is Your House

Portugal's village lodgings put you in the place. By JEANINE BARONE

Travel in Portugal often brings to mind the Algarve region's sun-streaked seaside resorts and sophisticated retreats in close proximity to well-tended fairways. But the country's vast hilly and forest-covered landscapes are home to centuries-old ghost villages that are seeing new life as accommodations. As economic opportunities beckoned elsewhere, these stone hamlets saw their populations dwindle. Once vibrant communities eventually fell silently into disrepair.

The dawn of the 1990s brought government funding and private investment that began stimulating a village resurrection. Using regional materials, traditional construction, and a local workforce, this effort is a creative lesson in economic sustainability. Stay at any of these reconstructed villages (*aldeias*) and you'll have a window into Portugal's rich cultural heritage.

The newest, **Aldeia da Pedralva** (www.aldeiadapedralva.com; from \$124), lies minutes from the Algarve's beaches in an expansive park, Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa

Vicentina. It will be Portugal's largest rural guest village with some 31 restored houses and old barns, a vegetable garden available to all guests, and an array of activities, including bird-watching, fishing, surfing, and trekking. In the former old schoolhouse, Web design workshops will

be offered to both villagers and guests.

Snuggled on a plateau above the ocean and the Ribeira Grande River on the Azorean island of Flores, **Aldeia da Cuada's** (www.wonderfulland.com/cuada; from \$116) 14 black basalt guest cottages—all bearing the name of the previous owner on a cartwheel—have warm, country-style interiors that feature patchwork rugs, dried local wildflower wreaths, and rustic china cabinets. Whether you choose to lodge in a one- or two-bedroom kitchen-equipped cottage, make sure to grill a freshly caught trout on your patio and stroll the cobbled lanes to watch the sunset from atop a low lava stone wall.

Among the network of 24 rehabbed schist villages (*Aldeias de Xisto*) in the center of Portugal, **Janeiro de Cima** (www.casadejaneiro.com; from \$72), 27 miles from Fundão, stands apart. Nestled in the Zêzere River Valley, the houses Casa de Janeiro or Casa da Pedra Rolada are an



Sun washes the interior (above) of a cottage at Aldeia da Mata Pequena and sets over Casas do Coro (left) in the 12th-century village of Marialva.

FRANCISCO DE ALMEIDA DIAS (UPPER); CASAS DO CORO (LOWER)

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The cottages at Aldeia da Cuada boast colorful bedspreads and whitewashed walls.

amalgam of dark stone schist and light-hued rocks taken from the Zêzere River. In either dwelling, choose one of the few spare suites with a private bathroom. Artisans offer classes at the Weaver's House, while the village bar serves Aguardente de Mel, a home-made honey brandy. Along the riverbank, board one of the replica *barcas*—wooden boats once used by villagers—for a slow cruise on the Zêzere River.

In Marialva, a historic village in central Portugal, a medieval castle looms over **Casas do Côro** (www.casasdocoro.com.pt; from \$198), with its eight mostly granite guest dwellings that huddle near the old fortification walls. Both the six-bedroom main house and the small cottages are individually outfitted—many with antiques and reproductions, Portuguese artwork, and Egyptian cotton sheets from the owner's factory. Garden patios planted with olive and almond trees are perfect lounge venues, as are the cabanas at the outdoor pool.

Just 35 minutes from Lisbon, **Aldeia da Mata Pequena** (www.aldeiadamatapequena.com; from \$87) evokes another era with details that include chintz bedspreads and trunks of exotic woods in the bedrooms and limestone salting tubs—originally used to preserve meats—in the kitchens. Casa do Padeirão, the oldest of the ten whitewashed cottages, offers the largest kitchen. A former village meeting spot is now an eatery serving codfish fritters. Owners Diogo Batalha and Ana Partidiário organize donkey walks to picnic spots in a nearby forest.

CHECKING IN

Attention: Bookworms

Leave your tomes at home.

No need to bring your own bedtime reading at the **Heathman Hotel** (<http://portland.heathmanhotel.com>) in Portland, Oregon—its cataloged lending library stocks first editions signed by Pulitzer Prize winners and other author guests including Alice Walker and Tom Wolfe. You'll find *To Kill a Mockingbird* among the 1,500 titles by Southern scribes on hand at the **Martha Washington Hotel & Spa** (www.marthawashingtoninn.com) in Abingdon, Virginia. History buffs staying at the freshly renovated Beaux Arts-style **Jefferson** (www.jeffersondc.com) in Washington, D.C., will relish the library filled with leather-bound books about its namesake, Thomas Jefferson, other former Commanders in Chief, and the nation's capital. Big Easy visitors are offered Sony Readers at the **Dauphine Orleans Hotel** (www.dauphineorleans.com), or they can choose printed books, which—unlike the high-tech version—can be taken home if you don't finish reading them before checking out.

—SHANNON MCKENNA SCHMIDT



A fireplace warms the cozy Jefferson hotel library.

STAYS UNDER \$150

Wroclaw, Poland, & Globe, Arizona

1 Mleczarnia Hostel, Wroclaw, Poland Tucked away next to the old synagogue in picturesque Wroclaw, a beautifully refurbished medieval city in western Poland, the Mleczarnia (or "dairy") Hostel may be hard to find, but it's well worth the search. Located in a renovated tenement that has kept its old-world charm along with its high ceilings, large arched windows, and hardwood

floors, the hostel has three private rooms with modern bathrooms. Downstairs at the old-fashioned Mleczarnia Club, you can eat, drink, and hang out all day—and well into the night. The club's intellectual vibe and candlelit, romantic interior make for one of the coziest and most inviting cafés in the city. From \$78; www.mleczarniahostel.pl/index_en.php.

—SALLY MCGRANE



Big sky views at the Dream Manor Inn.

2 Dream Manor Inn, Globe, Ariz. Situated on a hilltop near Globe, the Dream Manor Inn overlooks the Sonoran Desert with great views of the Pinal Mountains. Owners Carl and Rebecca Williams converted this former 1960s ranch house into a bell-towered, Tuscan-themed bed-and-breakfast surrounded by earth-toned villas. Guests can choose to lodge in individually designed rooms in the main house with polished wood furniture, kitchenettes, and private bathrooms, or ochre-colored villas with living rooms and private patios perfect for stargazing. Located next to an inviting sanctuary garden with a huge mulberry tree are a swimming pool and a manmade, two-story waterfall. From \$79, villas from \$99, includes breakfast, www.dreammanorinn.com.

—LUCAS AYKROYD

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All Whistler, All Winter

Where to lodge in Canada's ski country. By JOHN BRILEY

This winter, Whistler-Blackcomb in Whistler, British Columbia, will finally fulfill the vision its founders had when the chairlifts creaked to life in 1966: to host a major slate of events in the Winter Olympics (nearby Vancouver is the official 2010 host city). For Olympians and visitors alike, the 40-year wait will pay dividends. A faux-European village developed in the early 1980s at the base of the mountains harbors an eclectic mix of shops, restaurants, and bars. Last year Whistler

and Blackcomb mountains, which merged in 1997 to create the largest ski resort in North America, strengthened their physical link with the Peak-2-Peak gondola, an engineering marvel that carries skiers, boarders, and sightseers 2.73 miles between the mountains—at one point reaching 1,427 feet above the ground.

Even with so much grandeur, including high alpine glacier skiing and the second biggest vertical drop (5,280 feet) of any North American resort, you can still find a quaint place to stay. Here are four Whistler lodgings that offer alpine village charm amid the limelight of Canada's marquee mega-resort.

Nita Lake Lodge

Abutting a 15-acre lake on the south end of Whistler, this 77-room boutique hotel and spa is a classic seductress: A hearth-warmed bar with couches anchors the lobby; rooms feature heated stone floors,

large soaker tubs, basalt stone fireplaces, and 40-inch plasma-screen TVs. Lakeside rooms lord over the namesake view. The second-floor outdoor hot tubs are a tad small but fit with the boutique motif. A five-minute walk brings you to Whistler-Blackcomb's Creekside gondola. From \$139, www.nitalakelodge.com.

Sundial Boutique Hotel

The Sundial offers rich living at affordable prices. This ski-in/ski-out all-suite hotel smack in Whistler Village began as the Westbrook Hotel in 1982 and reopened after renovation in 2003 with a West Coast contemporary decor that includes roomy sitting areas and paintings by British Columbian artists. Rooms include full-size kitchens with granite countertops, gas fireplaces, and slate flooring. What you gain in convenience is lost in seclusion: The party scene in Whistler Village runs late, and the Sun-

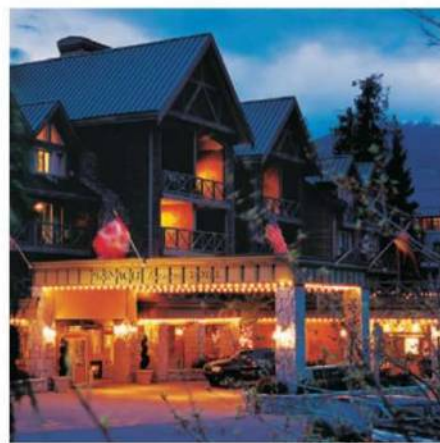
dial offers nowhere to escape the convivial crowds. But there's something to be said for clicking out of your boots and heading straight to the rooftop hot tub, then walking to one of three onsite restaurants or meandering the village on foot. From \$112, www.sundialhotel.com.

Whistler Pinnacle Hotel

Hard-core skiers and snowboarders come to Whistler for the terrain and the snow, amenities be damned. The Pinnacle is not for them. The hotel includes an outdoor heated pool and hot tub, set in a stone patio. Every suite features a small kitchen, balcony, fireplace, Jacuzzi tub, and sit-down shower. The on-site Quattro restaurant serves Italian cuisine, an extensive wine list, and (perhaps most appetizing) a discount to Pinnacle guests. From \$129, www.whistlerpinnacle.com.

Lost Lake Lodge

True to its name, this 100-room hotel has a western lodge vibe, is adjacent to Lost Lake and could, depending on your intake of après ski cocktails, make you feel a little disoriented. Lost Lake Lodge, 1.7 miles from the buzz of Whistler Village, is pleasantly set amid ample pines on the second hole of the Chateau Whistler golf course. The circular outdoor pool and hot tub aren't for lap swimming, but the fitness center, unlike the equipment closets found in many hotels, is actually spacious. Rooms are basic but comfortable, and all have full kitchens—a handy perk since there are no eateries on site. From \$89, www.whistlerpremier.com.



Guests can stay at the chalet-style Pinnacle Hotel in the heart of Whistler Village or at tranquil Nita Lake Lodge (top) 2.8 miles away.

IVAN HUNTER (UPPER), WHISTLER PINNACLE HOTEL (LOWER)



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CITY LIFE



48 HOURS

Copenhagen: Tidings of Good Cheer

The Danish capital is in the vanguard of eco-aware cities. By RAPHAEL KADUSHIN

When the United Nations Climate Change Conference meets in Copenhagen this December, the delegates won't have to look very far for environmental inspiration. An eco-pioneer before going green became stylish, Denmark's capital is seamed by parks, 186 miles of bike paths, and enough serious organic restaurants to earn some of the city's 14 Michelin stars. The once polluted waterfront is now so clean it feeds a network of popular harborside swimming pools—though it doesn't take much to draw nature-oriented Copenhageners outside.

FAST FACTS Copenhagen is the largest city in Denmark, with a metropolitan area population of 1.7 million, though the historic center of town retains a homey feel. Located on the eastern shore of the island of Sjælland (Zealand), facing the Øresund strait, it benefits from a surprisingly temperate maritime climate.

An international Santa Claus congress, begun in 1957, meets every summer in Copenhagen.

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1 Be Amused at Tivoli Since it first opened in 1843, Tivoli has been Copenhagen's family room, an amusement park with a 20-acre garden, a pantomime theater, a range of restaurants and cafés, and a battery of fairground rides, from gentle to teeth-rattling. "I like the Vertigo because of the power and speed," says Andreas Kristian Gjede, the 17-year-old conductor of the Tivoli Boys Guard, the garden's musical brigade. From November 20 to December 30, Tivoli reopens for Christmas, with a market of garland-draped stalls selling apple dumplings and with a roving troupe of costumed pixies. Following the city's lead, Tivoli is focused on becoming by 2010 the first amusement park to run on renewable wind energy.

2 Taste Scandinavian Pride The best symbol of Copenhagen's new culinary star power is the pioneering Noma, where chef/owner René Redzepi does full justice to a homegrown harvest of Greenland shrimp, Gotland beets, dill, sea buckthorn, and wood sorrel. "Noma's Nordic kitchen has inspired quite a few other restaurants in Copenhagen," says Søren Frank, food and wine editor of the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, "by inventing all the time and making our own wild herbs and shellfish the new luxury—the new foie gras, truffles, and caviar." Even Noma's setting underscores its sense of place. Located in a converted 18th-century harborfront warehouse, Noma gazes fondly (and hungrily) out to sea.

3 Float in a Boat The best way to see the city's glossiest new architectural



Clockwise from above: Turbot at Nimb Hotel's Restaurant Herman, Tivoli Gardens' pagoda outlined with Christmas lights, a cruise on Nyhavn canal.



showpieces and map the city's top cultural venues is to take a harbor tour. Companies like DFDS Canal Tours give a water-level view of recent landmarks, including Henning Larsen's Opera House, which floats on its own island. Opened in 2005, it's already famous for its mixed repertoire (Elvis Costello to Wagner) and a long slab roof that seems to hover above the building, as if all that

beautiful music was blowing the lid off the place. "It promotes the three traits you see in all new Danish buildings," says Jack Renteria, from the progressive 3XN Architects firm, "simplicity, functionality, and a standard of sustainability that would be hard to match anywhere."

4 Shop Classic Designs The hipster neighborhoods of Vesterbro, Nørrebro, and

Copenhagen Hotel Finder: Four Insider Picks

■ **Nimb** If you're going to splurge, this is the place to do it. Since opening in 2008 in the Moorish palace that borders Tivoli Gardens, Nimb offers guest rooms that deftly balance the best tech toys (think Bang & Olufsen flat screens) with exquisite antiques. All but one of the 13 rooms have Tivoli views. From \$383; www.nimb.dk.

■ **Bertrams Hotel Guldsmiden** While it isn't a Green Key Hotel, which guarantees a seriously enforced environmental policy, this homey hotel in the trendy Vesterbro area has

stylishly global rooms (four-poster beds, Persian carpets) and an organic breakfast buffet. From \$212; www.hotelguldsmiden.com.

■ **Copenhagen Island** Sixteen Copenhagen hotels qualify as Green Key properties. Among the most dramatic is this glass landmark on an island in the harbor. From \$180; www.copenhagenisland.com.

■ **Danhostel Copenhagen City** Don't expect a Nordic showcase at this 1,020-bed hostel. But the location close to Tivoli makes up for the



minimalist lodgings. A top-dollar room, still a bargain, gets you a scenic view of the city and a private bath. From \$35 for a shared room; www.danhostel.dk.



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Rosenborg Castle.

Islands Brygge are luring adventurous shoppers with their quirky boutiques and galleries. But the Strøget, central city's pedestrian shopping street, still stocks the best haul for classic Danish finds. "Illums Bolighus is Copenhagen's temple to design," says Renteria. Here you'll find contemporary classics for the home, including a miniature, boxed version of Arne Jacobsen's iconic Egg Chair, if the real thing is too big to pack. At the neighboring Royal Copenhagen shop, Flora Danica tableware is handpainted with Danish wildflowers, mushrooms, and plants.

5 Eat a Real Danish Pastry If Danish modern cooking seems too sober, join the grandmothers and their granddaughters taking tea at Conditori La Glace, which opened in 1870. "It's a classic," says journalist Adam Price of the newspaper *Politiken*, "the place to drop by for hot chocolate and their famous sports-cake," an impressive cloud of crushed nougat, whipped cream, macaroon, and caramelized choux pastry. Just as good are the signature pastries named after great Danes, including a Hans Christian Andersen cake that blends lemon mousse and raspberry butter.

6 Strap on Skates "I like to ice skate at the big open-air rink in Kongens Nytorv, because it's very romantic," says Andreas Gjede. A few blocks away, the 17th-century Rosenborg Castle gazes out on one of Copenhagen's original odes to nature: the lush King's Garden—equally ethereal whether dusted with snow or in full bloom.

Copenhagen Photo Gallery: See more pictures at <http://traveler.nationalgeographic.com/2009/11/copenhagen-photography>.

CITY SHORTS

Urban News Bites

The latest from Britain, Mali, and more.

Oxford Britain's oldest museum, the Ashmolean, reopens its doors this November after a redesign by architect Rick Mather that replaced all but the 19th-century Cockerell building with 39 fresh galleries. A part of Oxford University, the newly skylit showcase invites visitors to draw their own connections between the museum's many treasures, which include Raphael drawings, a third-century Gandharan Buddha, and the Alfred Jewel, a filigreed gold and enamel ornament from

Anglo-Saxon times. At the new rooftop restaurant (the city's first), simply pull up a seat and feast your eyes on Oxford's skyline. Off campus, mingle with students at Freud Café-Bar (Walton St.), housed in a Greek Revival church. ■ **Bamako** Long known for its music, Mali's capital is also the birthplace of the region's most renowned photographers, Malick Sidibé and the late Seydou Keita.

In their black-and-white portraits, subjects are often posed against graphic backgrounds, with props like vintage motorbikes, transistor radios, and big sunglasses. Celebrating the tradition, the city's eighth African photography biennial will be held November 7–December 7 with photographs and video works by 40 artists. Mohamed Camara is one to look for; his interiors are staged for rawness and mystery rather than high style. ■ **San Francisco** Using cake as her canvas, pastry chef and former art student Caitlin Williams Freeman serves up desserts at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's rooftop café that pay sugary homage to greats such as Josef Albers and Richard Avedon. Inspired by a Wayne Thiebaud in the permanent collection, Freeman transformed his painted rendition of a Boston cream pie into a raspberry/lemon-flavored confection. Other masterpieces on the rotating menu include an Ellsworth Kelly fudgsicle and a red velvet Roy Lichtenstein.



Unexpected images of Africa, like this one by Fouad Maazouz, mark Bamako's photo biennial. SFMOMA's rooftop café serves art-inspired desserts, such as the Mondrian cake (upper).

TOAST OF THE TOWN

Dallas's Spanish Connection

It's easy to imagine you're in Spain while perusing works by El Greco, Picasso, Goya, and other masters at the **Meadows Museum** in Dallas (<http://smu.edu/meadows/museum>). Dubbed the Prado of the Prairie, this intimate museum houses one of the most noteworthy collections of Spanish art this side of the Atlantic. "It's a specialized collection of superb quality," says director Mark Roglán, ranging from Renaissance altarpieces to Impressionist landscapes. Located on the campus of Southern Methodist University, the museum—celebrating its 45th anniversary in 2010—was founded with a donation of paintings from a local businessman. "He went to Spain looking for oil, but the only oil he brought back was on canvases," Roglán says. The recently renovated entry plaza is dotted with modern and contemporary sculpture, while a new terrace overlooks one of the museum's signature pieces: Santiago Calatrava's imposing "Wave," made of 129 bronze-coated steel bars that emulate undulating water.

—SHANNON MCKENNA SCHMIDT

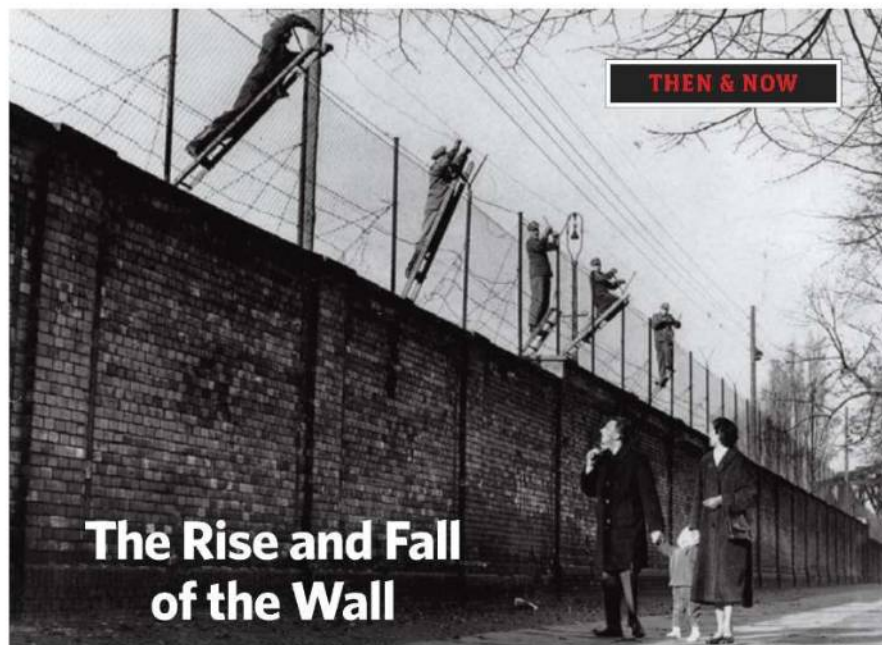
LOCAL EATS

Top Chefs: Czech Edition

As Prague commemorates the 20th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution ending 40 years of communism, local gourmets also celebrate the demise of a certain official party manual. "At chef school before 1989, we worked from one state-approved cookbook, the most boring cookbook ever," says Executive Chef Roman Paulus of



Alcron restaurant at the Radisson Blu Alcron Hotel. "It taught us how to destroy traditions." Nowadays in downtown Prague, classic dishes such as *svickova* (roast file of beef with a cream sauce) are respectfully reinvented at **La Dégustation Bohême Bourgeoise** (www.ladegustation.cz). Heavenly dumplings elevate a simple rabbit loin at **Cerny Kohout** (*palacinky* dessert with plum ice cream [above]; www.cernykohout.cz). And the Art Nouveau **Café Imperial** (www.cafeimperial.cz) once again bears witness to creativity and buzz on its menu (braised lamb shank, luscious veal cheeks), thanks to Zdenek Pohleisch, Prague's first celebrity chef. —SYLVIE BIGAR



BERLIN Berliners were surprised to wake up to the news that a barrier was going up between Russian-controlled East Berlin and the western half of the city on August 13, 1961. Passage between east and west Berlin had been a casual, daily occurrence. The wall, nearly a hundred miles long and manned by armed guards, changed all that. According to the Berlin Wall Documentation Center, 136 people were killed trying to cross it. Events all over Berlin will commemorate the fall of the wall 20 years ago this November. At Alexanderplatz, an open-air exhibit chronicles the peaceful revolution. On November 9, the Festival of Freedom will feature giant dominoes tumbling along more than a mile of the former border at the Brandenburg Gate. —SALLY MCGRANE



A remaining slab of the Berlin Wall (above), formerly capped with barbed wire (top).

GOODS TO GO

A Chair Right Out of Africa

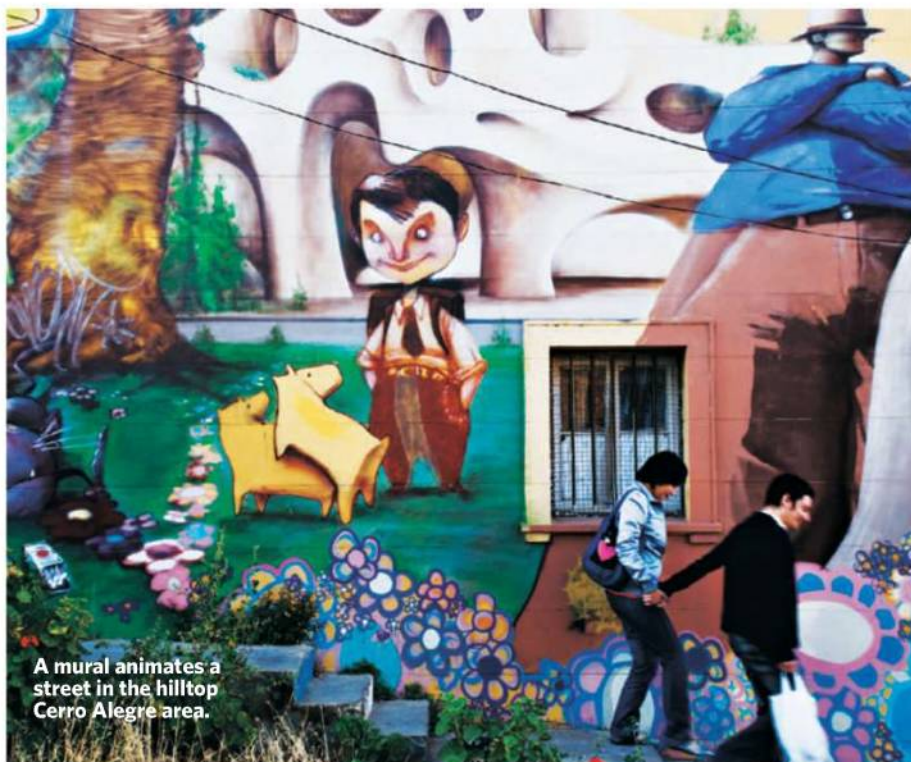
Most travelers on an African safari have at some point lounged on a folding canvas camp chair. A legacy of colonial-era jaunts in the bush, the handcrafted wooden chairs—along with afternoon tea and Oriental rugs—are a fixture of any self-respecting safari lodge in Africa, so evocative are they of "civilized" exploration. But the ubiquitous camp chairs are surprisingly difficult to purchase. In gateway cities such as Nairobi, traditional curio shops that cater to tourists do not carry them. The chairs typically have to be special-ordered from shops such as **Sandstorm**, with outlets on Ngong Road and Limuru Road (about \$120; www.sandstormkenya.com) or **Ark Tents and Leather**, on Ngong Road (about \$55). You can also find them for sale along the sides of major thoroughfares, though quality varies. Look for hardwood construction, sturdy stitching in the canvas, even varnishing, and solid metal fasteners. Check baggage allowances to avoid excess fees. —NORIE QUINTOS



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A mural animates a street in the hilltop Cerro Alegre area.

ON FOOT

The Poetic Streets of Valparaíso

Wander the mural-lined lanes of this Chilean port town that inspired Pablo Neruda. By ANDREW EVANS

I love Valparaíso,” wrote poet Pablo Neruda, who faced his desk toward the endless Pacific Ocean view. A 2.5-hour drive from Chile’s capital, Santiago, the booming port was left to rust after the Panama Canal changed shipping routes in 1914. Today its 264,000 residents cling to the old-world architecture and steep streets of this South American San Francisco. This walk can fill one long day or be quickened by trading the stiffer climbs for scenic rides on the city’s iconic funiculars.

Set your bearings at **1 Plaza Sotomayor** in front of the light-blue wedding cake that is Chile’s former naval headquarters. Before heading for the hills, take a right detour onto Serrano and check out the bohemian scene at **2 Bar La Playa**, Valparaíso’s oldest antiestablishment hangout. Fake flowers dress the dark-paneled walls, and huddled thinkers still cluster around scattered wooden tables as they have since 1908. Head back across the open square to the curvy Bauhaus-style **3 Consejo Nacional de Cultura y Las Artes**. The glass-enclosed, government-sponsored art space highlights some of Valparaíso’s contemporary talent with edgy photography shows.

Continue north on Plaza Justicia and dole out the hundred-peso (18-cent) fare to ride the rickety, 107-year-old funicular, the Ascensor El Peral, to the hilltop neighborhood of Cerro Alegre. Pick up some vintage postcards from the sidewalk vendors outside **Palacio Baburizza**, named after the Croatian nitrate baron, whose funky, red-and-white checkered art nouveau mansion is scheduled to reopen in 2010 as the Municipal Fine Arts Museum. Across the street, steps lead to the hidden patio of **4 La Colombina** restaurant—don’t miss the working mini

model of a funicular. Plan on returning for some *congrito*, or grilled eel.

Continue uphill past the century-old Victorian homes, then descend left between the psychedelically painted walls of Pasaje Bavestrello. Cross Urriola street and follow the steps directly across that veer left. **5 Pasaje Gálvez** is a twisting, colorful canyon splattered with provocative graffiti—though it might more accurately be called public art. Local competition among the quarter’s professional artists keeps quality high—peek around the occasional open door for a glimpse into their working ateliers.

Stop to smell the flowers lining **Paseo Gervasoni**, a stately row of gabled, pastel-colored homes built by wealthy English and German immigrants. Peruse the wares of indie jewelry makers outside and watch painters putting the jumbled rooftop view down on paper. Additional watercolors are on display at nearby **6 Lukas Museum**, dedicated to the Italian political cartoonist who loved Valparaíso so much he believed that “every Chilean architect should take his final exam here.”

On the corner, indulge in a decadent lunch at **7 Café Turri’s** alfresco terrace. Try *las machas a la parmesana*, a local specialty of razor clams baked in white wine, cream, and parmesan cheese. The café’s Breton chef Erwan Salaün moved here seven years ago and finds the neighborhood not unlike the 18th arrondissement of Paris: “Edith Piaf knew this city—she sang about it.” You’ll pass souvenir art galleries and jaunty organ grinders on Calle Templeman on your way to Avenida Montt. Take your coffee with a heavy dose of books at **8 Café con Letras**, where you’ll find everything Neruda ever





This organ grinder plays a tune while his parrot "dances."

wrote on the packed shelves.

Crossing from one hill to the next, explore the elaborate Gothic tombs of English shipwreck victims and other non-Catholic dead at **9 Cementerio Disidentes**. The nearby **10 Parque Cultural Ex Cárcel** served time as a prison and a performing arts space; now it's being reimagined as a cultural center due to be completed by late 2010.

The largest and most impressive street murals can be found at **11 Museo a Cielo Abierto** in neighboring Cerro Bellavista. The evolving "open air museum" was initiated by art students in 1969; for maximum effect, descend the staircase from the Dissidents' Cemetery (Pasaje Harrington), cross over to Yervas Buenas, and mount the winding steps of Súbida Pasteur to Paseo Guimera. If the climb seems too daunting, take a roundabout detour to Calle Aldunate, where you can ride the Ascensor Espíritu Santo up.

Follow Calle Rudolph and make the final ascent up Calle Ferrari to Plaza de los Poetas. Pablo Neruda's verdigris statue stands in the park, just one block from his home, **12 La Sebastiana**, a tall, thin house built on one of the highest hills in Valpo. Skip the long-winded museum and head straight up to the writer's peaceful, windowed study. The unbroken harbor view makes for a lyrical photo. Neruda's own words on poetry best describe it: "I made my own way...and I suddenly saw the heavens, unfastened and open."

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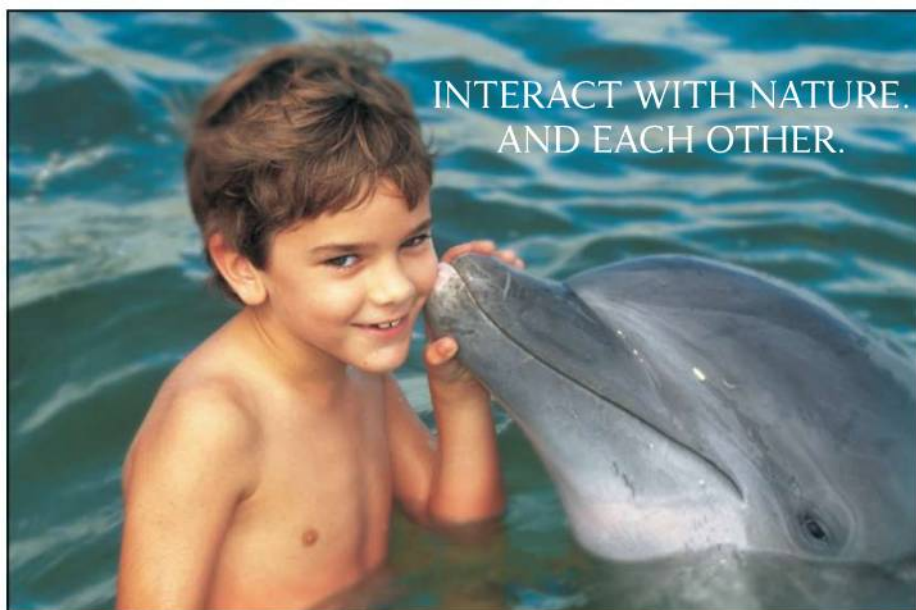
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A DESTINATION SCORECARD

133 Places R

Subjected to development, mass tourism, pollution, globalization—are the world's great places still...great? We rank scores of iconic destinations that we first surveyed in 2003, and introduce some up-and-comers. **BY JAY WALLJASPER**

INTRODUCTION BY JONATHAN B. TOURTELLOT,
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CENTER
FOR SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS



ated

THIS IS THE SIXTH ANNUAL SURVEY OF DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

to appear in *Traveler*. Conducted by the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations, it revisits some of the iconic places we first surveyed in 2003 and rated in April 2004. We also threw in a few new destinations to keep things interesting.

The condition of any destination is a mix of what local governments, residents, and businesses can control—pollution, cultural quality and authenticity, tourism management—and what they can't, such as natural disasters and global economic meltdowns. After more than five years, how have the scores changed?

At first glance the survey method (see page 64) may seem less than exact. We contact as many experts in pertinent fields as we can and ask them to rate the places they know. We then average their scores and publish the results. But statistical experience shows that group judgment can be surprisingly accurate—the “wisdom of crowds” effect. In 2003, when we had about 200 experts on the survey panel, the top-scoring destination was the Norwegian Fjords area, the lowest Spain's Costa del Sol. This year's 437 panelists, fewer than a hundred of whom participated in our 2004 survey, gave the highest and lowest scores to—trumpets, please—the Norwegian Fjords and the Costa del Sol. The only difference? The fjords rated even higher than before (85 versus 82), while the infamous, hotel-lined “Costa del Concrete” dipped lower (31 versus 41).

If there is any pattern in scores for the retested destinations, and panelist comments about them, it is this: When people care about the condition of a place, its score tends to go up and stay there. For destinations that gained at least five points—on a survey like this, smaller moves aren't very significant—panelists cited initiatives to protect (Serengeti, up 10; mid-coast California, up 8), to restore (Hue, up 11), to improve facilities (Rajasthan, up 8), or combined efforts (Copán, up 7; Cappadocia, up 8).

But when people see a place as a tourism cash cow, scores tend to slip (Ha Long Bay, down 5 since 2006; the Inside Passage in Alaska and British Columbia, down 7 in five years; the Grenadines, down a troubling 17 in two years). Panelists docked five of the seven “Bottom Rated” places—and many of those “In Trouble”—for reckless development and commercialization.

If there is a blessing to the global economic downturn, it is the respite from such rampant, quick-buck degradation of Earth's remaining beautiful places. The break will be only temporary, however, unless the places at risk—and the people who visit them—learn from the places that care. —J.B.T.



Elephants young and old gather at water holes in Kenya's Masai Mara reserve (left). An extension of the Serengeti Plain, the Mara is popular for its array of wildlife—perhaps too much so. It is not unusual for safari vehicles to crowd around a single animal sighting (above), contributing to the Mara's middling score of 53.



The pastoral Yorkshire Dales garnered positive reviews as "one of the few places on the planet where humans have improved upon nature."

QUEBEC GASPÉ PENINSULA

"The Gaspé is essentially a driving destination, with many interesting villages and natural sites. Tourism is seasonal, which has reduced pressure for extensive tourism infrastructure. Much therefore remains authentic."

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BEST-RATED PLACES

In excellent shape, relatively unspoiled, and likely to remain so.

Rank 1. Norway: Fjords region (score: 85) The Fjords, which topped the charts in our 2004 rankings, get even higher marks this year. "About as good as can be done," says one panelist. The gorgeous scenery and the "well-preserved Norwegian rural life" are vigorously protected, plus "the local people seem to benefit." Should keep a wary eye on the growing cruise business.

2. British Columbia: Kootenay/Yoho National Parks (score: 81) On the western slope of the Canadian Rockies adjoining Banff, these two national parks are "essentially wilderness" with a "good, marked trail system" and outstanding "visitor management." "An awe-inspiring destination in summer."

3. Quebec: Gaspé Peninsula (score: 80) Jutting into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the colorful Gaspé Peninsula offers "oceanfront, islands, and inland mountains" within "excellent parks and reserves," along with "authentic Francophone" villages. A big part of the area's appeal is "tourism development largely on a human scale."

New Zealand: South Island (score: 80) "A place of incredibly diverse beauty," with mountains, vineyards, lakes, "one beautiful beach after another," and "clean" cities. "Laid back and not geared specifically for the

tourist; welcoming to them while the locals go about their daily lives." The future looks rosy because "stewardship is built into the culture as a whole."

4. Japan: ancient Kyoto (score: 79) Kyoto, one of Asia's most sacred sites, is "magnificently preserved and managed," and honors the "serenity and charm of ancient Japan." It showcases a "rich legacy of living cultures and festivals, immaculate gardens, a variety of crafts and cuisines, all within a modern city."

5. Vermont (score: 78) "More than any American state, Vermont has worked to preserve those qualities that make it unique," such as scenic countryside, lively small towns, historic streetscapes, local businesses. A tourist magnet in summer, it nonetheless "never seems overrun by visitors." Scores well for "environmental- and social-sustainability practices."

Slovenia (score: 78) The northernmost of the former Yugoslavia's republics, Slovenia wins praise for being "savvy about balancing tourism with cultural and historical preservation." Ljubljana, the capital, is "colorful, vibrant, and architecturally appealing," and "Slovenia's Alps and wine country remain among the most sustainable and authentic places to visit in Europe."

Australia: Kakadu National Park (score: 78) Half the size of Switzerland, this diverse land of rocky hills and river valleys in Australia's Northern Territory is jointly managed by government officials and Aboriginal people. "Wonderful wildlife, unspoiled beauty," and Aboriginal

rock art are major draws. Darwin, the main gateway, is “an undistinguished frontier town.”

Spain: Medieval Granada and the Alhambra (score: 78) “The beauty and variety of Granada still astonish me after 40 years of visits.” The “magical” palace and gardens of the Alhambra comprise “one of those rare must-see destinations that lives up to the hype.” The Alhambra is an innovator in managing tourist numbers; visitors are “absorbed into the urban milieu with little overt impact.”

6. Germany: Bavarian Alps (score: 77) “A great place to get lost in a remote village and get to know the locals.” Balanced tourist development and environmental protection are strengths, even at popular attractions, but traffic woes are mounting. Hiking is the way to go.

Oregon-Washington: Columbia Gorge region (score: 77) “The U.S.A.’s Rhineland,” not just for the wineries, but for “an incredible job of protecting the views and many towns with considerable charm.” Great potential for “agritourism and geotourism.” On the downside: major dams and highways.

England: Yorkshire Dales (score: 77) The Dales, much of which form a national park of valleys and villages, stand out as “an icon of sustainable tourism.” Visitors are rewarded with “wonderful” farmhouse B&Bs, great hiking opportunities, and “friendly village pubs.” But high housing prices are driving away young people, and limited public transportation poses problems.

Scotland: The Highlands (score: 77) Popular with visitors since the time of Queen Victoria, the Highlands

don’t give “the sense that they’re a tourist destination.” Local people are part of the attraction and “appear to be in control of development for their benefit.” Second homes and nonlocal workers in the hospitality industry have begun to threaten the authenticity.

Chile: Torres del Paine (score: 77) Panelists rave about the “breathtaking” scenery of this national park in Patagonia, where cougars roam and “gauchos ride horseback around volcanic peaks.” Though generally well managed, there are worries about future overuse.

7. Massachusetts: Berkshires (score: 76) This area in western Massachusetts “seems to have the right balance” of picturesque towns, arts offerings, and well-protected natural beauty. Some complain it is becoming too “gentrified,” with “boutiques pushing out the mom-and-pop establishments.”

Portugal: Douro Valley (score: 76) This wine region in northern Portugal charms some with its “historic and natural attractions” and disappoints others with its “suburbanization.” Most agree about the region’s intact cultural authenticity.

Switzerland: Engadine region (score: 76) “An incredibly beautiful landscape” dotted with mountain villages, including the famous ski resort St. Moritz. Earns high praise for both ecological and social integrity. “The main problem in the Engadine is the increasing number of second homes” that are empty most of the year.

Wales (score: 76) “I was gobsmacked by the beauty of the Welsh countryside,” says one panelist. “Extraordinary,



Japan superstar, regal Mount Fuji rises beyond the Han-no-ki Folk Culture Museum (above). “Lovingly presented and beautifully maintained, Fujisan is a textbook model of sustainable tourism,” says one panelist of this landmark that scored a 74. Also scoring well, for “high environmental quality and aesthetic appeal”: Canada’s peaks-and-lakes Yoho National Park (below).



Erosion and increasing numbers of visitors are affecting Turkey's wondrous—and geologically fragile—region of Cappadocia (below). Outdoor sites are “amazingly well-handled, with mass tourism concentrated in well-policed areas.” The Bahamian isle of Eleuthera (right), still “surprisingly uncrowded” for a Caribbean island close to the U.S., rates well for its relatively unspoiled charm. Cautions include paying attention to the environmental impact of new developments and cleaning up trash.



verdant, and with 500,000 Welsh speakers,” chimes in another. The only drawbacks seem to be rainy weather and environmental degradation from mining.

8. Belgium: Bruges historic center (score: 75) A marvel of historic preservation that seems to bring 16th-century Flemish culture to life. Bruges is “sublime—a walking city of great charm and exuberance.” Still, tourists at times can overpower the sense of a living city.

France: Corsica (score: 75) “One of the most charming destinations in the Mediterranean,” the island of Corsica contends with ballooning numbers of summertime visitors, yet manages them relatively well. This is because the notoriously free-spirited Corsicans are “very much involved in tourism and very friendly,” but “inherently suspicious of any development.”

France: Brittany (score: 75) “There are lots of tourists in this coastal region of France, but they don’t overwhelm the little towns. The coastline and the agricultural landscapes are spectacular.” Key drivers include a strong sense of local character and strong regional management practices.

9. Japan: Fujisan (Mount Fuji) (score: 74) Tourist overload is inevitable at this world-famous peak, but “the Japanese people give it great respect,” which has helped with campaigns to reduce trash and protect the mountain’s natural qualities.

PLACES DOING WELL

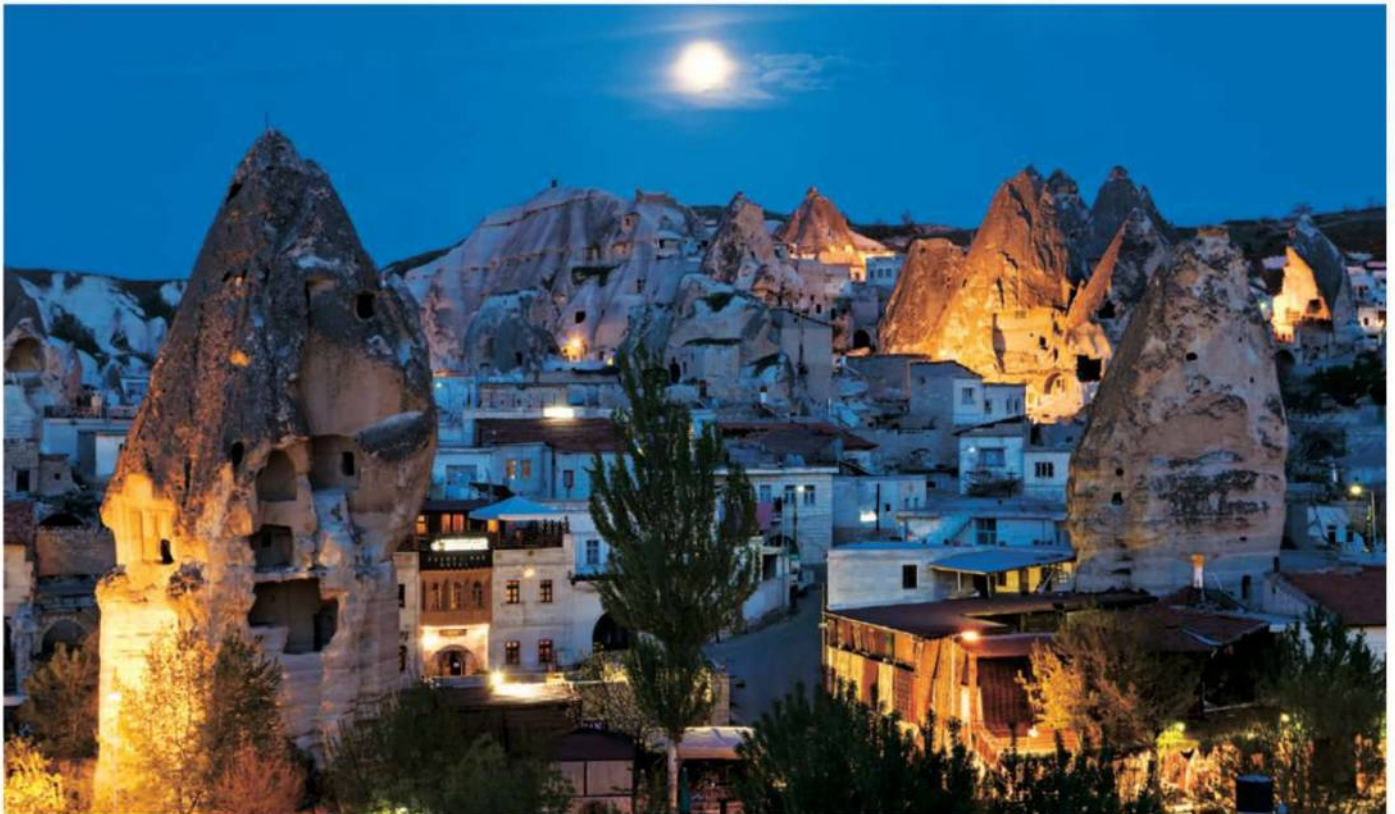
Retaining sense of place, with a few surmountable problems

10. Turkey: Cappadocia (score: 73) This fragile world treasure—an otherworldly landscape of spirelike rock formations housing ancient domiciles—is “beautifully preserved” and “so far appears sustainable,” though “the soft volcanic stone into which many of the rooms are carved is porous, erodes easily, and is difficult to stabilize once damaged or cracked.”

Brazil: Pantanal (score: 73) This, one of the world’s largest wetlands, is a must-visit for wildlife enthusiasts. A vast place with “amazing ecological quality” despite cattle farming and other environmental concerns. A hopeful sign: Tourism projects “benefit locals.”

11. Denmark: central Copenhagen (score: 72) “The world could learn a lot from Copenhagen.” A world leader in sustainable urban development and a mecca for bicyclists, “it is walkable, historic, charming, with lots to see and do.” Crowds and litter are by-products of the city’s increasing popularity.

California: northern coast (Marin County to Eureka) (score: 72) Legendary for its wineries and scenic coastline, this region also entices with “the calm and quiet



AL ROD/CORBIS (UPPER), GAVIN HELLIER/GETTY IMAGES (LOWER)

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My goodness, I was handsome in 2008!

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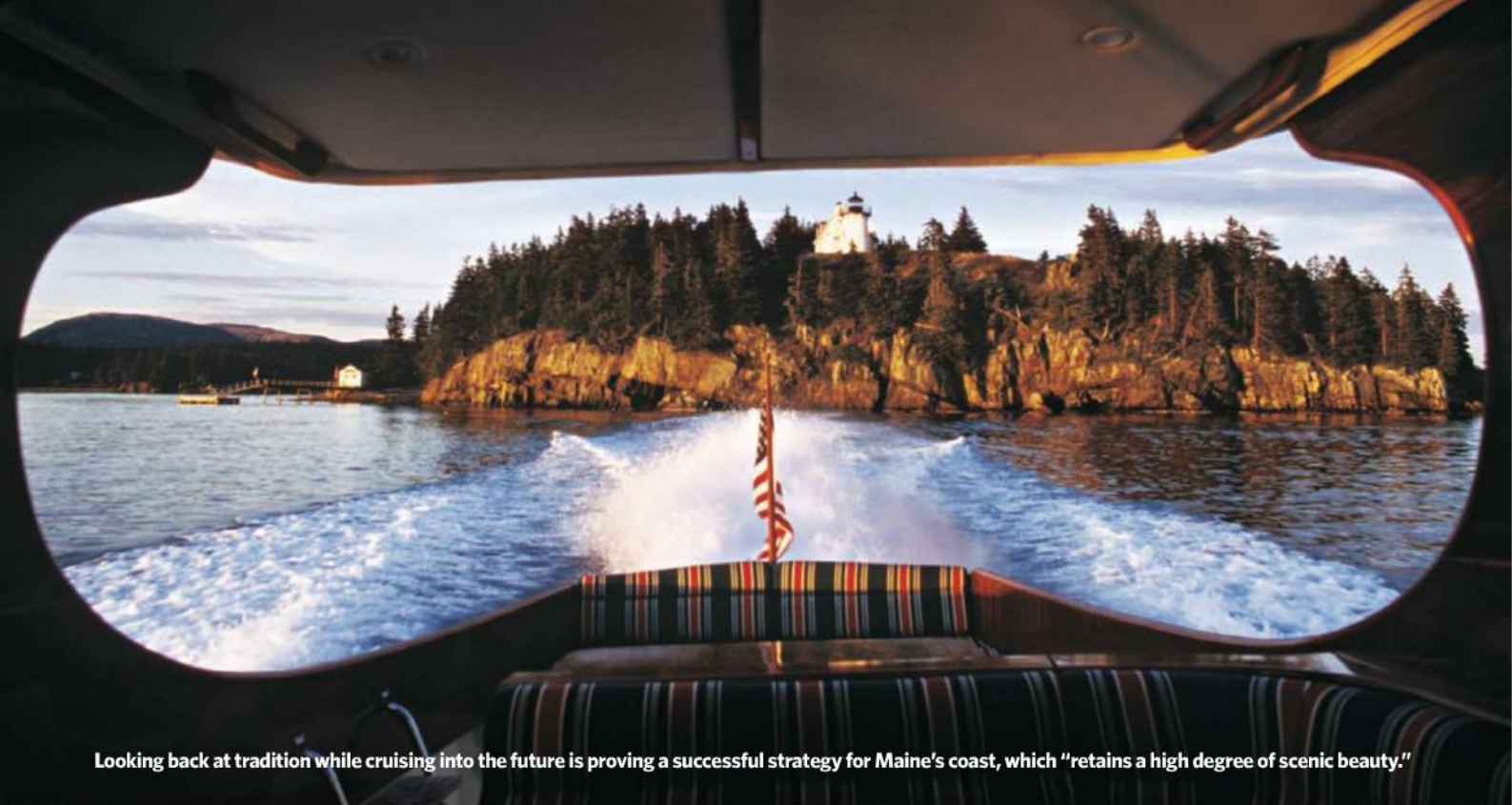
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I'm an even handsomer chap in 2009!

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Looking back at tradition while cruising into the future is proving a successful strategy for Maine's coast, which "retains a high degree of scenic beauty."

THE BAHAMAS ELEUTHERA ISLAND

"With careful management, Eleuthera can maintain its charm and small town/island feel, and attract other environmentally and socially responsible tourism investors and developers. Harbour Island is a charming town that caters to yacht rather than cruise tourism."

—MARTHA HONEY
RESPONSIBLE-TRAVEL EXPERT

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of small towns, farms, and ranches." Despite suburban sprawl in Sonoma and Marin, "development appears to be within reason and consistent with the environment."

Maine: coastal area (score: 72) Populations explode along the southern coast in summer. "The farther north you go, the better preserved the region." Overall, Maine's coast strikes "a good balance of tourist and local" interests. Prospects look good, with tourism run by many locals "who realize their future lies in preservation."

Italy: Tuscany (score: 72) "Tuscany somehow works its magic on every visitor," thanks to its "wonderful landscape," art-filled towns, cuisine, gardens, local character, and, increasingly, agritourism. Even traffic and crowded roads can't break the spell.

Austria: Salzburg historic center (score: 72) Mozart's hometown wins applause from our panel for its "attractive" pedestrian center, well-preserved architecture, and "genteel culture with echoes of classical music all around." Sour notes are sounded about seasonal crowding and Mozart overkill.

12. Ireland: Ring of Kerry (score: 71) "Rural green Ireland is quickly disappearing," but not along this 105-mile route through the southwest of the isle. You'll find "quaint villages," "sweeping views of the sea," and the "delightful" Kerry Way hiking path—but also numerous tour buses and unfortunate road expansions.

Bahamas: Eleuthera (score: 71) "A laid-back paradise" for scuba divers and anyone else in search of a "real place" in the islands. Pollution problems are growing, along with the feeling that it is becoming "a pleasant ghetto of the privileged."

Australia: Uluru (Ayers Rock) (score: 71) A "dramatic" sandstone formation rising from the desert, Uluru holds

a "mystical" quality for local Aborigines and many tourists. The sacred site enjoys "excellent care and sustainability programs," but keeping visitors from climbing the rock itself—an offense to Aborigines—is challenging. The hike around the base is the way to go.

Chile: Rapa Nui (Easter Island) (score: 71) Chilean officials, local residents, and tourists are uniting to preserve "one of the world's great places." Issues to tackle: curbing increasing numbers of cruise ships and flights, and involving native Rapa Nui people more directly in presenting the site. Kudos: the nixing of a proposed casino.

Wyoming-Montana-Idaho: Yellowstone/Grand Teton region (score: 71) These jewels of the U.S. National Park System are being well cared for. "Park management and concessioners have both adopted pretty advanced techniques for the conservation of the natural resources and wildlife." But snowmobiles in the park and sprawl in adjacent communities could spell trouble.

Netherlands: Amsterdam historic center (score: 71) This agreeable city, which manages to be both urbane and relaxed, has gained significantly since first ranked in 2004. Our travel experts applaud it for being "environmentally aware" and one of the most pleasantly walkable cities in the world. "Bravo to the Dutch for doing a great job of maintaining their historic core."

Quebec: Laurentian Highlands (score: 71) These green hills dotted with lakes and rivers are alive with recreational opportunities—skiing and golf, but also biking, hiking, kayaking, and exploring "many villages where a true sense of community still exists." Sprawl, however, is creeping north from Montreal.

Samoa: Upolu (score: 71) Recently hit by a tsunami, this tropical island nonetheless offers a classic Pacific-isle experience, thanks to its concerted effort to maintain

DAVID MCLEAN/AURORA PHOTOS



“small-scale tourism in a village setting.” *“Fa’a Samoa*, the Samoan way, includes care of the natural setting.” Apia, the capital city, suffers “traffic problems.”

Tanzania: Serengeti Plain (score: 71) “An amazingly beautiful place and a rich ecosystem in terms of wildlife.” The fabled Serengeti Plain has jumped 10 points since 2006 thanks in part to “improved stewardship.” Local guides are “first-rate.” Still, Maasai assertions that tour operators are seizing some Maasai lands illegally need to be addressed.

Greece: Delphi (score: 71) Rugged Mount Parnassus is the place to see “outstanding” Greek ruins without “being pushed along by crowds.” The site is praised for its “top-notch” museum and “spirit of place” but faulted for inadequate interpretation.

California: mid-coast, Santa Barbara to Monterey (score: 71) This “fascinating mix of wild coasts, mountains,” wineries, and scenic towns has picked up 8 points since 2004 thanks to a “return to ‘authenticity’ and to good stewardship.” Forest fires, traffic pressures, and the state’s budget crisis loom as threats.

13. New Mexico: Taos and the Enchanted Circle tour (score: 70) “The rich mixture of Anglo, Hispano, and Pueblo cultures gives authenticity that few places can rival.” Yet there are rising concerns that the area “has lost a lot of its rustic character over the last decade.”

It’s hoped that the new Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area will help on that front.

South Africa: Kruger National Park (score: 70) This is “Africa’s Yellowstone—a beautiful, well-managed park, but dangerously overloaded” with eager nature lovers. Local communities need to have more share in the park’s successes.

14. Seychelles (score: 69) This archipelago nation of 115 islands off the east coast of Africa generally deserves its “reputation as a green destination,” though “more could be done to protect local fish and sea turtles.” Good record maintaining “social and cultural integrity.”

Italy: Lake District (score: 69) Continues to live up to its reputation as a gorgeous destination that offers a taste of the good life, but facing strains from water pollution and too many cars.

15. Virginia: Williamsburg/Yorktown/Jamestown (score: 68) “Well-managed” historical sites that evoke key moments in U.S. history, linked by the picturesque Colonial Parkway. But suburban sprawl encroaches.

England: Cornwall (score: 68) Marvelous diversity on a relatively small sliver of land, ranging from tin mines with World Heritage status, to celebrated gardens, coast trails, and architecturally rich towns like St. Ives. Also here: overloaded beaches and “tacky” Land’s End.

The sheer scale of Colorado’s Rocky Mountains guarantees vast swaths of land virtually untouched by man, including the cascading waterfalls and rugged high meadows of Porphyry Basin (above). But, says one panelist, “the Front Range is crowded, as are the western slopes and ski areas.”

NORTHERN ITALY
LAKES DISTRICT

"The Lakes area has maintained much of its character and beauty. There are many well-preserved and off-the-beaten-track places that remain authentic. However, pockets are becoming overdeveloped, with a resulting loss of environmental quality and social and cultural integrity."

—ROSS A. KLEIN
CRUISEJUNKIE.COM

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Historical interpreters in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, weave baskets. Say panelists: "A very well-managed site," but with an "antiseptic quality."



Honduras: Copán (score: 68) Impressive Maya ruins are enhanced by excellent local guides and dedicated management, which accounts for Copán's 7-point gain since 2006. Attractions include hot springs and coffee farms. Government offices have "failed to act" on "the need to expand the national monument and ensure protection."

16. Alberta-Montana-British Columbia: Waterton-Glacier "Crown of the Continent" region (score: 67) These adjoining national parks along the U.S.-Canada border feature "excellent" environmental practices, including public bus service and enlisting neighboring ranchers in conservation efforts. But park officials can't stop the "atrocious" development along the western approach nor the melting of glaciers due to global warming.

New Caledonia (score: 67) This island territory in the South Pacific is "an intriguing mix of original Kanak and French colonial heritage," where enduring "family ties" discourage large-scale resorts. The fringing coral reefs are still "intact," though "nickel mining has done significant damage."

17. Colorado: Colorado Rockies (score: 66) "In surprisingly good shape" despite "condo mania" and mining. "There are still so many pockets to explore and find solitude in." Ski-resort growth remains an issue.

Kentucky: Bluegrass Country (score: 66) The area's "fun little towns" and "beautiful rolling hills" surprise many first-time visitors. Highlights include horses, bourbon, and Southern charm. Also here: some of "the urban sprawl and fast-food sameness that you see everywhere in the U.S."

Arizona: Grand Canyon/Tusayan (score: 66) "The Park Service does a commendable job" managing the heavy streams of tourists at one of the "wonders of the world." Auto and motor-home traffic can diminish the experience on the South Rim; the North Rim and the Colorado River corridor offer "a more natural experience."

China: Qin Emperor Mausoleum, Xi'an (score: 66) The home of the Terra Cotta Warriors inspires high praise: stunning, astonishing, sensational. "China has taken great care to preserve this site" but needs to improve how the history is presented.

Croatia: Dalmatia's coastal isles (score: 66) The appealing medieval towns, "splendid landscapes," unspoiled waters, and deeply rooted local traditions escaped ruin during the Balkan War. But mass-scale tourism, especially cruise ships, poses new challenges.

Argentina: Patagonian Andes region (score: 66) "A great destination for adventure tourism, and now ecotourism" amid one of the world's most "gorgeous, pristine" landscapes. But panelists express concerns that an absence of environmental planning foretells problems yet to come.

British Virgin Islands (score: 66) The smaller islands in this group have maintained their lovely charm, but the B.V.I.s are "looking less virginal with each passing year" due to overdevelopment.

18. Utah: Arches/Canyonlands/Moab (score: 65) Moab, center of the universe for mountain bikers, exhibits definite growing pains and commercialization, but the "wonderful" national parks are holding up very well.

California: Yosemite area (score: 65) "Still unique and breathtakingly beautiful," which is a sign of good management since the area attracts big crowds. Though absolutely necessary, the rules regulating tourist visits "detract from the spirit of getting back to nature."

19. Alaska-British Columbia: Inside Passage (score: 64) "You can't help but return home from here with a sense of awe and renewed spirit." But the unique culture of the coastal towns can be lost in the hubbub of cruise ships, the reason this destination's rank dropped markedly from 2004. Insiders recommend trying local ferries.

India: Rajasthan (score: 64) This is "India's Tuscany," in the opinion of one panelist. "Strong sense of cultural identity" and "remarkable appeal and mystique." Improved tourist facilities fueled an 8-point jump from five years ago, though concerns remain that tourism benefits are not reaching local communities.

Vietnam: Hue (score: 64) "The most beautiful city in Vietnam" posted the highest upward leap from previous rankings because of the restoration of its magnificent citadel. Ugly new high-rise hotels, however, chip away at ancient Hue's historical character.

Vanuatu (score: 64) This Melanesian island nation embodies the South Pacific qualities of our dreams. But a foreign takeover of tourist development has alarmed some and helped send Vanuatu's score down 10 points in just two years.

KRISTA ROSLOW/NGS



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MICHIGAN
TRAVERSE CITY REGION

"Traverse City has retained its cultural character, especially with the reopening of the historic Opera House and State Theater. Area beaches are very clean yet under extreme pressure in summer, and traffic can approach that of a major city."

—TED J. LIGIBEL
HISTORIC-PRESERVATION
EDUCATOR

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One of the largest living entities on Earth, Australia's Great Barrier Reef—actually a composite of almost 3,000 individual reefs—faces multiple challenges, including coral bleaching from ocean warming and sediment and nutrient runoff from the mainland.

PLACES IN THE BALANCE

A mixed bag of successes and worries, with the future at risk.

20. Michigan: Traverse City and lakeshore (score: 63) This charming town and nearby National Lakeshore is "a Midwestern secret of beaches, dunes, lighthouses, cherry orchards." But it must deal with summertime crowds and proliferating vacation homes and watercraft. Downtown Traverse City thrives with locally owned businesses.

Arizona: Sonora Desert region (score: 63) This desert is "a world-class landscape," but "the march of gated communities," strip malls, and trailer parks is overtaking the region. The Arizona Sonora Desert Museum gets an enthusiastic rating from our panel. "It is critical to visit this vast region and understand why deserts are equally critical to the balance of nature on this planet."

21. Caribbean: The Grenadines (score: 62) A string of several hundred islands that once ranked near the top of our ratings has fallen precipitously in the past two years due to dubious land deals with foreign firms and commercialization catering to cruise ships. Still, it is "a beautiful place that overall remains appealing."

Costa Rica (score: 62) Hailed as a leader in ecotourism, Costa Rica's middle-of-the-road showing in this year's rankings was unexpected. The country's green reputation may have panelists holding it to higher standards.

Other factors influencing the score: "large-scale resorts" rising on the Pacific Coast and "growing crime, including against tourists."

Virginia: Shenandoah Valley (score: 62) "Another iconic landscape being nickel-and-dimed to death." The area is beautiful, relaxing, and rich in "locally grown products," but I-66 funnels inappropriate development from D.C.

Hawaii: Maui (score: 62) Our panel expressed great affection and great concern for Maui. Many "inland areas remain lovely," and some felt strongly that the road to

"heavenly" Hana shouldn't be "improved." But the coast at its worst is all "golf-saturated, cookie-cutter resorts."

Australia: Great Barrier Reef (score: 62) Has "one of the best management regimes of any protected marine zone in the world"—a model for other countries, though the fleets of tour boats cause problems. Tragically, the reef may be among the first of Earth's natural treasures to be lost to global warming, warn some panelists.

Czech Republic: Prague Old Town (score: 62) This gem of a European city struggles with "a rapid oversaturation of tourists." The old city still enchants but increasingly

has become a "tourist ghetto" as locals "are pushed out" by high prices and the sense that it is no longer theirs.

Nepal: Annapurna Circuit (score: 62) Adventurers and spiritual explorers are drawn to this series of trails in the Himalaya. Even with the rigorous conditions, the place can become jammed with trekkers and their garbage. The site is "generally well managed," but "perhaps a ceiling on visitor numbers could be applied."

22. Grenada (score: 61) The island has recovered from the devastation of Hurricane Ivan, keeping its mood of "charming simplicity." Big beachfront developments in the southern half of the island are "beginning to erode the pristine beauty" and diminish the water quality.

Hawaii: Island of Hawaii (score: 61) The popular Big Island showcases "a great deal of natural beauty and cultural depth." Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park is singled out for particular kudos. On the coast, however, "nearly every place where the ocean is safe for swimming there is a hotel, and traffic can be a nightmare."

Texas: Hill Country (score: 61) This region near San Antonio and Austin is "fairly intact ecologically" but lacks "true regional planning and conservation management." Two panelists made a plea to establish a park to protect this distinctive landscape. "The state slogan is 'Don't Mess with Texas'—but this isn't applied to land developers."

South Dakota: Mount Rushmore/Badlands (score: 61) America at its most iconic, Mount Rushmore is unfortunately "crowded and touristy," while "the Badlands are well managed" by the National Park Service. Several panelists point out that "American Indian culture needs more respect and involvement in the economy."

23. Jordan: Petra (score: 60) Recently named one of the "New" Seven Wonders of the World, Petra is an ancient desert city carved into hillsides. "Aesthetically, there is perhaps no more beautiful site in the world." Its remote location has preserved it until now, but "when was the last time representatives of the different communities sat down and discussed how they could work together to retain this jewel?"

England: Stonehenge (score: 60) "One of the most significant World Heritage sites," a place of "spiritual energy" that is compromised by busy roads right around it. In spite of this, many people find it a moving experience.

India: Kerala Backwaters (score: 60) The lakes, rivers, and canals in this southern Indian state, which visitors ply aboard houseboats, present a unique travel and cultural experience. However, "the number of boats is now so large" that environmental degradation is feared.

24. Indonesia: Bali (score: 59) "A charming destination overshadowed by foreigners enjoying a cheap and laid-back lifestyle." Bali's distinctive Hindu culture endures even with the beachside "party atmosphere of tourists."

Jamaica: Port Antonio area (score: 59) A historic town spared the pollution, crime, and poor planning bedeviling other parts of Jamaica. "Most tourism benefits go to the wealthy, who have walled off the beautiful coastline." Not sustainable long-term ecologically or socially.

AFRICA
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HOW THE “PLACES” SURVEY WORKS

This survey—our sixth “places rated” list—isn’t a popularity contest.

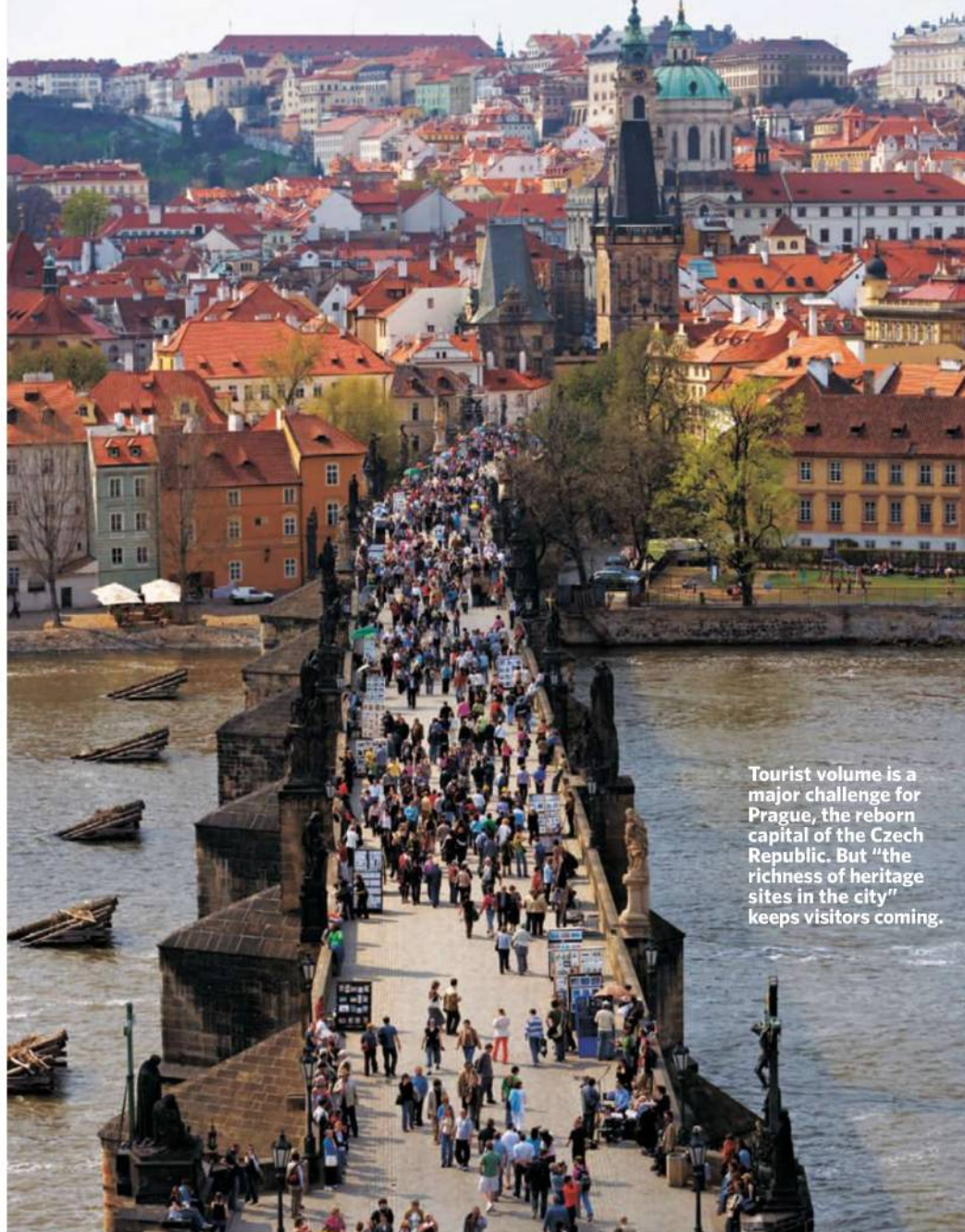
It is an assessment of **authenticity and stewardship**, evaluating the qualities that make a destination unique and measuring its “integrity of place.” Thus the remote islands of the Grenadines can rate notably higher than popular St. Maarten.

Because evaluating an entire destination involves such unquantifiables as aesthetics and cultural integrity, we decided the best measure would be informed human judgment. We therefore assembled a panel of 437 well-traveled **experts in a variety of fields**—historic preservation, site management, geography, sustainable tourism, ecology, indigenous cultures, travel writing and photography, and archaeology.

We asked the panelists to evaluate only the places with which they were familiar, using our customary **six criteria**, weighted according to importance: environmental and ecological quality; social and cultural integrity; condition of historic buildings and archaeological sites; aesthetic appeal; quality of tourism management; and outlook for the future.

Experts began by posting **points of view** on each place—anonymously, to ensure objectivity. After reading each others’ remarks—a variation of a research tool called the Delphi technique—panelists then filed their final scores. For the list of panelists who participated in this survey, see www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler.

The resulting **Stewardship Index** rating represents the average of informed judgments about each place in all its manifestations—as a whole. Like the scores posted by Olympic judges, our experts’ ratings reflect both measurable factors and intangibles (style, aesthetics, culture). And like Olympic athletes, each of the destinations rated here has an opportunity to improve.



Tourist volume is a major challenge for Prague, the reborn capital of the Czech Republic. But “the richness of heritage sites in the city” keeps visitors coming.

Belize: reef and islands (score: 59) “This area is right in the crosshairs of overdevelopment.” Ecological quality is still “excellent,” and locals are helped by small-scale tourist operations. But enforcement of environmental regulations is lax, and the “quick-buck mentality” is gradually creeping in.

Chile: Valparaíso (score: 59) A romantically shabby port city perched atop steep hills overlooking the Pacific Ocean. “Valparaíso is the poster child of lack of interest in developing a beautiful and traditional urban landscape,” says one panelist. “Poverty, crime, and rundown slums” are ongoing problems, but signs of a community-based arts renaissance are encouraging.

25. Indonesia: Borobudur (score: 58) The spiritual qualities of this huge Buddhist shrine dating to the eighth century still shine but are in danger of being obscured by “extremely aggressive hawkers.” The “monument has been very well restored.” Still, villagers “see it as an object of tourist interest only.”

Massachusetts: Cape Cod (score: 58) “Some parts are beautiful and well-managed,” but more bike trails, conservation areas, and public transit are sorely needed to overcome the Cape’s “car-intensive nature.” Some towns are losing their character, and environmental quality has declined, but the area instills a loyalty in visitors, offering hopes for improvement.

Tanzania: Kilimanjaro (score: 58) Everyone knows that the famous snows are melting; what we don’t hear as much about are the mounds of garbage left by the growing numbers of hikers. The good news: Trails are “well maintained”; camping sites and huts are in “good shape”; guides are well trained and “proud of being able to work in such a magnificent location.”

Bolivia-Peru: Lake Titicaca (score: 58) Set high in the Andes, the largest lake in South America thrills travelers with “dramatic scenery” and “fascinating” local culture. Yet pollution from mine operations and untreated sewage is becoming a serious problem, while lakeside

towns, especially on the Peruvian shore, suffer from “uncontrolled development.”

26. Turkey: Azure Coast (score: 57) Long a top destination for the sailing set, Turkey’s southwest coast is feeling “the strain from a massive increase in tourism.” Ancient ruins, the scenic seashore, and a relaxed village ambience are the attractions, but without better management these may disappear beneath a wave of large resorts and cruise-ship docks.

Zimbabwe/Zambia: Victoria Falls (score: 57) “The long-term sustainability of these falls depends on the political situation” in Zimbabwe. “Uncontrolled tourism development is currently evident on Zambia side.” The cascades themselves are “astounding.”

Greece: Athens Acropolis (score: 57) Panelists voiced familiar complaints about air pollution and crowding along with a sense that “central Athens and the Acropolis have improved immeasurably” since the 2004 Olympics. A new museum answers concerns about indifferent interpretation. In the end, “the Acropolis still amazes and humbles.”

Greece: Santorini (score: 57) “One of the most picturesque destinations in the world”—but to stay that way it “needs to develop a willingness to say ‘no’ to increased mass tourism.” The roads, sewage system, beaches, and main city can’t handle any more.

St. Lucia (score: 57) “Among the most beautiful and lush of the Caribbean islands,” being challenged by an increase in problems—tourist dollars bypassing local people, a lack of environmental controls, too many all-inclusive resorts—that go far to explain a 7-point dip in score in just two years.

27. Peru: Cuzco, Machu Picchu, Sacred Valley (score: 55) Machu Picchu is “fantastic” and “the local culture is still genuinely alive.” However, there is distress about “intense” overcrowding. Nearby sites are seeing rapid development, but “one gets a glimpse of something eternal.”

Guatemala: Tikal/Flores (score: 55) Tikal, a Maya archaeological park, gets good marks, and the nearby town of Flores, on an island in Lake Petén, is full of “charm.” But there is deep unease about crime and the destruction of local rain forests in this poor nation, and wholesale overdevelopment pushed by some government officials.

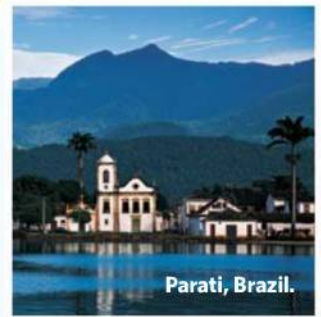
France: French Riviera (Côte d’Azur) (score: 55) No one goes here to get back to nature, but the worsening traffic jams, ugly new construction, and sky-high prices are dismaying. Yet “incredible beauty persists, and it’s easy to find quiet, charming villages.” Still, “increased population pressure and beach erosion are issues.”

28. Ontario-New York: Niagara Falls area (score: 54) “The first tourism destination in North America” has had development as an issue for 170 years. The water in the falls is cleaner now, but a legacy of “overwhelming kitsch” and “tackiness” prevails. Pluses: An “attractive” vineyard area and projects for landscape preservation.

Brazil: Rio de Janeiro beach districts (score: 54) There is no other place like this in the world: beautiful beaches looking up at beautiful hills in the middle of a gritty, spirited, vibrant city. Diminishing the romantic allure: “violence, poverty, and robbery,” which increase the need to tackle social problems. The beaches and adjoining neighborhoods are holding up remarkably well.

Thailand: Chiang Mai (score: 54) This colorful town is taking on the trappings of a typical city with air pollution, congestion, vice, and shoddy new buildings. Out of town, you’ll find “rain forest and stunning karst landscape scenery,” which can be toured with “ecofriendly” outfitters. “Cultural conservation is high,” but a plan to manage tourism is desperately needed.

29. Kenya: Masai Mara (score: 53) This park inhabited by the Maasai people “remains a jewel.” Summer wildlife migrations are “the greatest show on Earth!” Poaching is down and conditions for the Maasai are improving, but safari vehicles tear up the land and “wildlife populations have declined by about 60 percent in 30 years.”

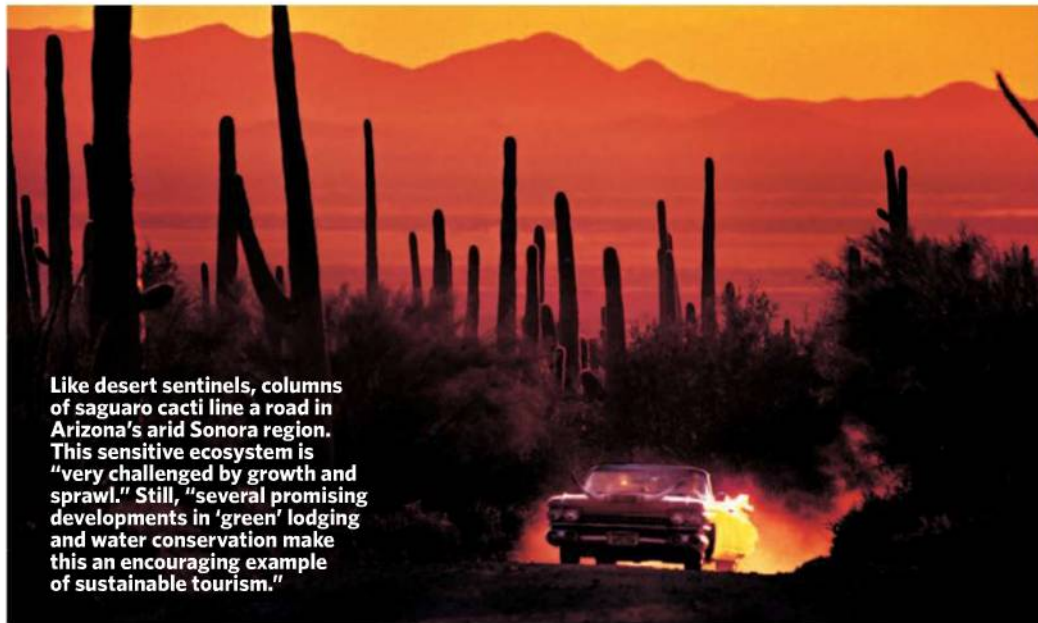


Parati, Brazil.

PREVIOUSLY RATED DESTINATIONS

This survey doesn’t rate all the places that appeared in past destination surveys. Here are scores for a selection of places rated in our 2006, 2007, and 2008 surveys.

Aleppo, Syria 68
Assisi, Italy 75
Avignon, France 75
Bath, United Kingdom 78
Bryggen, Bergen, Norway 73
Budapest, Hungary 71
Carthage, Tunisia 61
Colonial Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic 52
Córdoba, Spain 79
Crete, Greece 62
Dubrovnik, Croatia 68
Florence, Italy 65
Évora, Portugal 78
Great Wall, China 56
Greater Blue Mountains, Australia 72
Guanajuato, Mexico 79
Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain 37
Jerusalem, Israel 54
Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn region, Switzerland, 76
Kathmandu Valley, Nepal 39
Krakow, Poland 73
Malta, Mediterranean 55
Marrakech Medina, Morocco 63
Masada, Israel 69
Middle Rhine Valley, Germany 74
Mont-St-Michel, France 62
Historic center of San Juan, Puerto Rico 69
Oaxaca and Monte Albán, Mexico 69
Portobelo-San Lorenzo, Panama 41
Pueblo de Taos, NM, U.S.A. 63
Old Quebec City, Canada 77
Rhodes, Greece 63
Riga, Latvia 68
Parati, Brazil 76
Siena, Italy 77
Valdés Peninsula, Argentina 66
Versailles, France 77



Like desert sentinels, columns of saguaro cacti line a road in Arizona’s arid Sonora region. This sensitive ecosystem is “very challenged by growth and sprawl.” Still, “several promising developments in ‘green’ lodging and water conservation make this an encouraging example of sustainable tourism.”



A celebration of the summer solstice attracts throngs to Stonehenge, England's famous prehistoric site. Very popular in summer—at times excessively—Stonehenge "must be managed if this site is to be preserved for the future."

Australia: Byron Bay, New South Wales (score: 53) It's "a tourist town" in ways both good and bad. Pluses: great beaches, "superb art/music events," and the easygoing ethos of a former hippie haven. Drawbacks: "congestion/noise" and a sense the place is "phony" and "overhyped."

Florida: Sanibel/Captiva (score: 53) "Locals have fought to maintain the character of these islands—and have largely succeeded." Yet these Gulf Coast destinations now face destructive "red tides," agricultural runoff, and the continuing drumbeat of overdevelopment.

PLACES WITH TROUBLES

Under severe pressures; many places working to recover.

30. Ethiopia: Lalibela and rock-hewn churches (score: 52) "The least known marvel of the world," Lalibela was a New Jerusalem for Ethiopian Christians in the 1100s. Today, tourist facilities are primitive, erosion is a threat, and locals have little encouragement to protect the heritage. However, the 11 churches are "spectacular."

Honduras: northern coast (score: 52) An undiscovered destination now undergoing rapid "touristization," the North Coast offers rich indigenous culture and good ecotourism potential—along with environmental degradation, violent gangs, and political corruption.

India: Agra area—Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri (score: 52) "Agra, the host to these three iconic World

Heritage sites, is in dire need of environmental planning." "Things are getting better for these historic sites mainly through the hard efforts of local heritage-protection activists." But the "townscape lies in utter neglect."

31. New York: Long Island shore (Hamptons to Montauk) (score: 51) "Off-season, the Hamptons are heavenly." In season, "avoid at all costs" due to high prices and traffic. Environmental protection loses to water sports, fertilized lawns, and preserving "real-estate values and privacy."

Greece: Crete, north coast (score: 51) Endowed with archaeological, natural, and historical assets, the coast is "relatively intact" and "the story of such places as Knossos are well presented." But it is "more and more like a bad imitation of the worst of the Spanish coast."

Italy: Venice and lagoon (score: 51) A one-of-a-kind treasure that is imperiled by floods, rising sea levels, water pollution, the exodus of longtime residents, and a pronounced shift to "day-tripper" tourism. Even with all of those challenges, though, "Venice still ranks high on charm, history, and romance."

32. French Polynesia: Tahiti (score: 50) Trouble in paradise. The main island—particularly its capital, Papeete—is "a disappointment, though the other islands are to die for." Major problems include "too much noise and too many seedy souvenir shops," along with "low environmental quality."

Ecuador: Galápagos Islands (score: 50) Earning a modest rebound of 6 points this year after a 23-point drop between

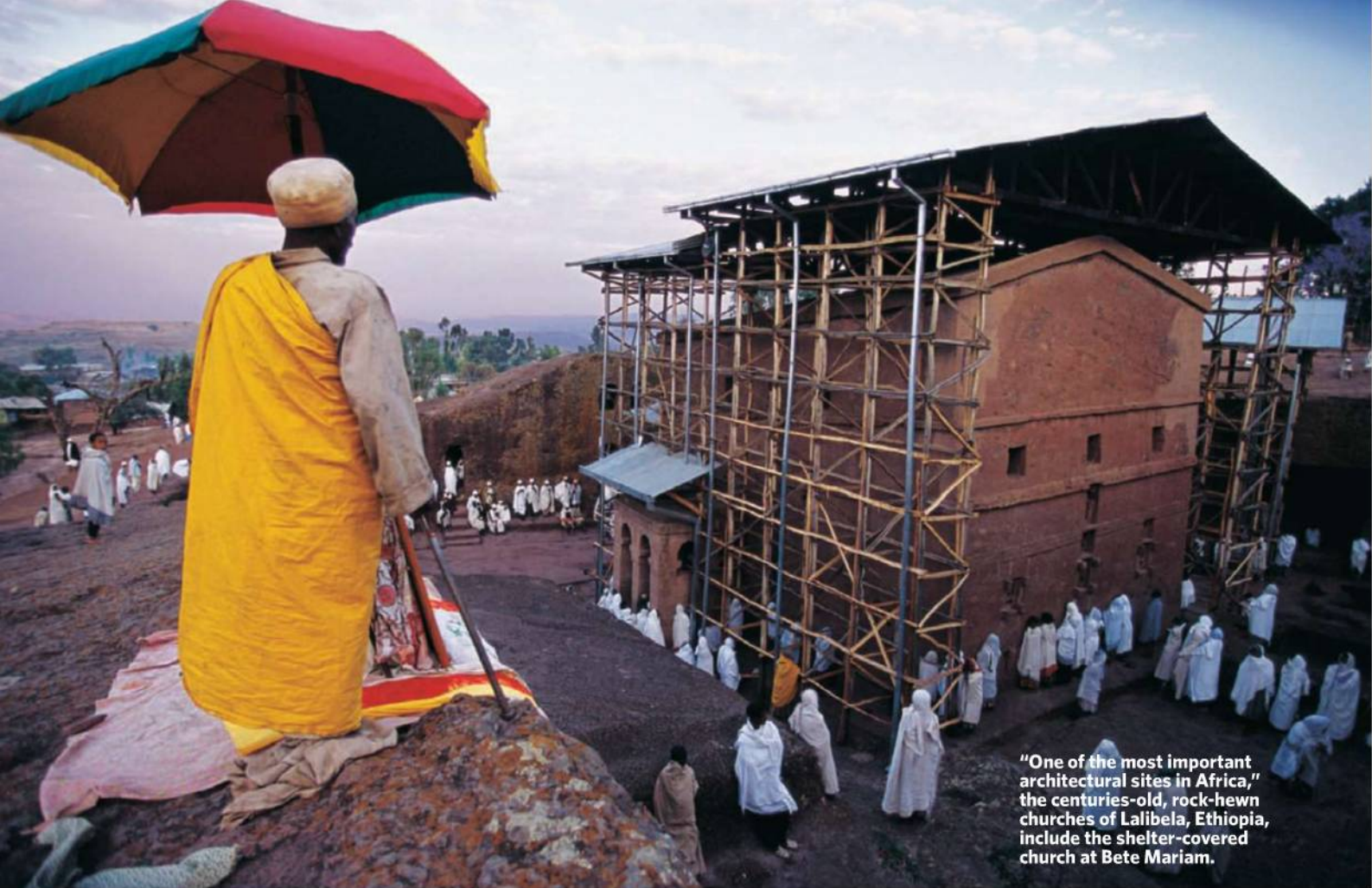
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"One of the most important architectural sites in Africa," the centuries-old, rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia, include the shelter-covered church at Bete Mariam.

SRI LANKA SINHALESE COAST AREA

"Sri Lanka, a country built on its hospitality and cultural and natural heritage, does tourism very well. But it will take many years to recover from the 2004 tsunami and recent political troubles."

—MELANIE COOKSON-CARTER
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
PROFESSIONAL

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destinations at traveler.nationalgeographic.com

2004 and 2006 suggests alarming trends in cruise-boat traffic and inappropriate development are being addressed. "Overpopulation by tourists and tourism facilities are a serious threat to the very product that is most spectacular." Other concerns: degradation of local waters, introduction of invasive species. Still, an "amazing" sight.

33. North Carolina-Tennessee: Great Smoky Mountains (score: 49) "A national treasure surrounded by a bathtub ring of ugly, unplanned development," especially in and around Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Air pollution is a growing issue. "Between the crowds and the pollution, a mess."

China: Lijiang and Three Parallel Rivers, Yunnan (score: 49) An ancient town that has been preserved by morphing into a "Disneyland" tourist attraction. "The natural setting of Lijiang is lovely—the mountains, green hills, the quiet back roads." The three rivers are protected in a national park, but hydro dams are a threat.

34. Florida: Everglades and Big Cypress (score: 48) "One of the best ecological destinations in North America" has become a long-running tragedy, with no end in sight. "Environmentalists are not able to hold the line against real estate and agriculture." The national and state parks remain "great."

Guatemala: Lake Atitlán (score: 48) This "beautiful lake surrounded by three volcanoes makes a perfect example to show how poverty pollutes. Must deal with the living conditions first, otherwise the ecological projects will fail." Water-treatment plants, growth-management

plans, and an economic shift "in the direction of medium and small enterprises" are part of what is needed.

Egypt: Luxor (Thebes, Valley of the Kings) (score: 48) An archaeological wonder on the Nile that suffers an invasion of tour buses, "misguided" management, and "commercial exploitation." Overcrowding has deflated the score by 10 points since 2006. However, some panelists find "seeds of hope." The "government is working hard to develop a more professional management plan."

China: Beijing historic districts (score: 48) "We must now speak of the Beijing historic districts in the past tense." Even what is left is marred by "revisionist history" and "over-restoration."

35. Andorra (score: 47) Small is not always beautiful. This micro-nation in the Pyrenees is "set in a very scenic area but seems to be a huge outlet mall." The villages survive as a repository of "social and cultural integrity"—perhaps the new foundation for overall sustainability.

Sri Lanka: Sinhalese coastal regions (score: 47) Hit hard by the 2004 tsunami and its long-running civil war, Sri Lanka "will take many years to recover its tourism economy." This could be an opportunity to launch major sustainable initiatives, such as tours of the tea and spice regions.

36. Cambodia: Angkor/Siem Reap (score: 46) "The temples at Angkor are arguably the most fascinating in the world," but two million visitors a year put them "under

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EGYPT NORTH RED SEA COAST

"Egypt's government continues to allow undisciplined and, in places, hideous urban sprawl north from Sharm El Sheikh, at towns like Nuweiba along the scenic Gulf of Aqaba. Signs of a similar chaotic pattern of development are also springing up on the Gulf of Suez."

—MANUEL L. KNIGHT
TOURISM SECTOR PLANNER

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on each of these rated destinations at traveler.nationalgeographic.com

tremendous strain." Also a problem: Tourism profits are not reinvested locally. The gateway city of Siem Reap is marked by "large, gaudy hotels" and growing slums.

37. Egypt: Pyramids, Giza (score: 45) Egypt's government deserves praise for "preservation work," although visitors confront "lots of trash," hawkers, and crowds. Needs a better management strategy; improved interpretive information is planned for a new visitors center.

Florida: South Beach (score: 45) The historic Art Deco District represents "a preservation success story, but South Beach is now suffering from success." Geared toward the "beautiful people and über rich," it is now becoming an ecological "disaster."

China: Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet (score: 45) The huge palace is in good shape, but "without the living culture of Tibetan Buddhism being able to thrive, it's only a facade." Lhasa resembles "a giant Chinese military camp" and is "in danger of losing its character."

38. Vietnam: Ha Long Bay (score: 44) A World Heritage site undermined by too many boats, with noisy engines fouling the water, air, and scenic beauty. "Surrounding areas are being developed with no apparent controls."

Israel-Jordan: Dead Sea (score: 44) Suffers one of the most dramatic declines of any destination on our list due to continuing "strife and serious environmental problems." The water level is dropping by more than three feet a year. Some panelists say the Jordanian side is less degraded, others that Israel has managed tourism "in a sustainable fashion."

planning based on residential tourism has destroyed most of the natural and cultural beauty" that make people want to visit. "There appears to be an effort to stem the tide and even roll back some of the worst excesses."

Maryland-Virginia: Chesapeake Bay (score: 42) Local historic sites are well preserved, but shopping centers and subdivisions obliterate local character. "The bay is dying as a natural ecosystem," and "large-scale factory farming is creating a huge stress." However, one panelist notes "Maryland's excellent agricultural protection program."

WORST-RATED

Severe problems; some destinations fighting back, some not.

41. Egypt: Northern Red Sea coast (score: 41) "Shabby mediocre resorts" abound in this area that is subject to "chaotic development." Urban sprawl is imminent. Coral reefs are being destroyed. But new ecolodges are offering a bit of hope for this "gorgeous" place.

Dominican Republic: north coast (score: 41) A land of all-inclusive resorts where visitors hardly glimpse the real life of the place. "The quantity of tourism arriving is a very big problem," notes a panelist. One consequence: "Locals are marginalized and desperate, and the experience is exploitive."

42. St. Maarten/St. Martin (score: 38) On the Dutch half of the island, "tourism has gobbled up the culture, which is now defined by the hotel/casino industry." The French side is overbuilt but has avoided so far the "fast-food joints," casinos, and concentration of duty-free shops.

43. Mexico: Cabo San Lucas region (score: 37) Sleepy fishing villages have been transformed into places "where drinking tequila shots upside down is the number one tourist attraction and gated communities are the main economic activity."

44. Bahamas: Grand Bahama (score: 35) "True tourism folly—unfinished shells of hotels, tacky shopping areas." "Cruise ship hell," says another panelist. Wealthy outsiders have bought up all the beachfront, leaving nothing for anyone else. "As a result, the locals are extremely bitter."

45. West Bank: Bethlehem (score: 34) The tourism industry in this symbolic town is "in shambles" because of ongoing Israeli-Arab fighting. "No matter what their politics, tourists here will be upset by the giant wall, the intimidating border crossing, the desolate and hopeless feeling of the city." Yet some see "huge potential."

46. Spain: Costa del Sol (score: 31) "Costa del Concrete" was the big loser in our rankings, staying at the bottom of the list, where it was in 2004. This year it scored even lower, by 10 points. "A textbook example of mass tourism run amok," with high-rise hotels, crammed beaches, water shortages, pollution, and indifference to local culture.

Jay Walljasper wrote our last "Places Rated" feature, which surveyed historic destinations (Nov./Dec. 2008).



Human impact, including golf courses and unfinished resorts, confer a low score of 41 on Egypt's northern Red Sea coast. Hopeful signs: "Safaris and eco-tourism are growing, with great potential for local communities."

Mexico: "Riviera Maya," Caribbean coast, Quintana Roo (score: 44) "Beautiful beaches obscured by miles of hotels," which threaten freshwater resources, coral reefs, mangroves, and the relaxed atmosphere. It's still possible to find "authentic natural and cultural tourism."

39. Portugal: Algarve (score: 43) "Indiscriminate bland development is ruining the coast," which often feels more British than Portuguese. Not as bad yet as Spain's Costa del Sol, and there's still an opportunity to save the "unspoiled" town of Tavira.

40. Spain: Costa Brava (score: 42) "Aggressive land-use

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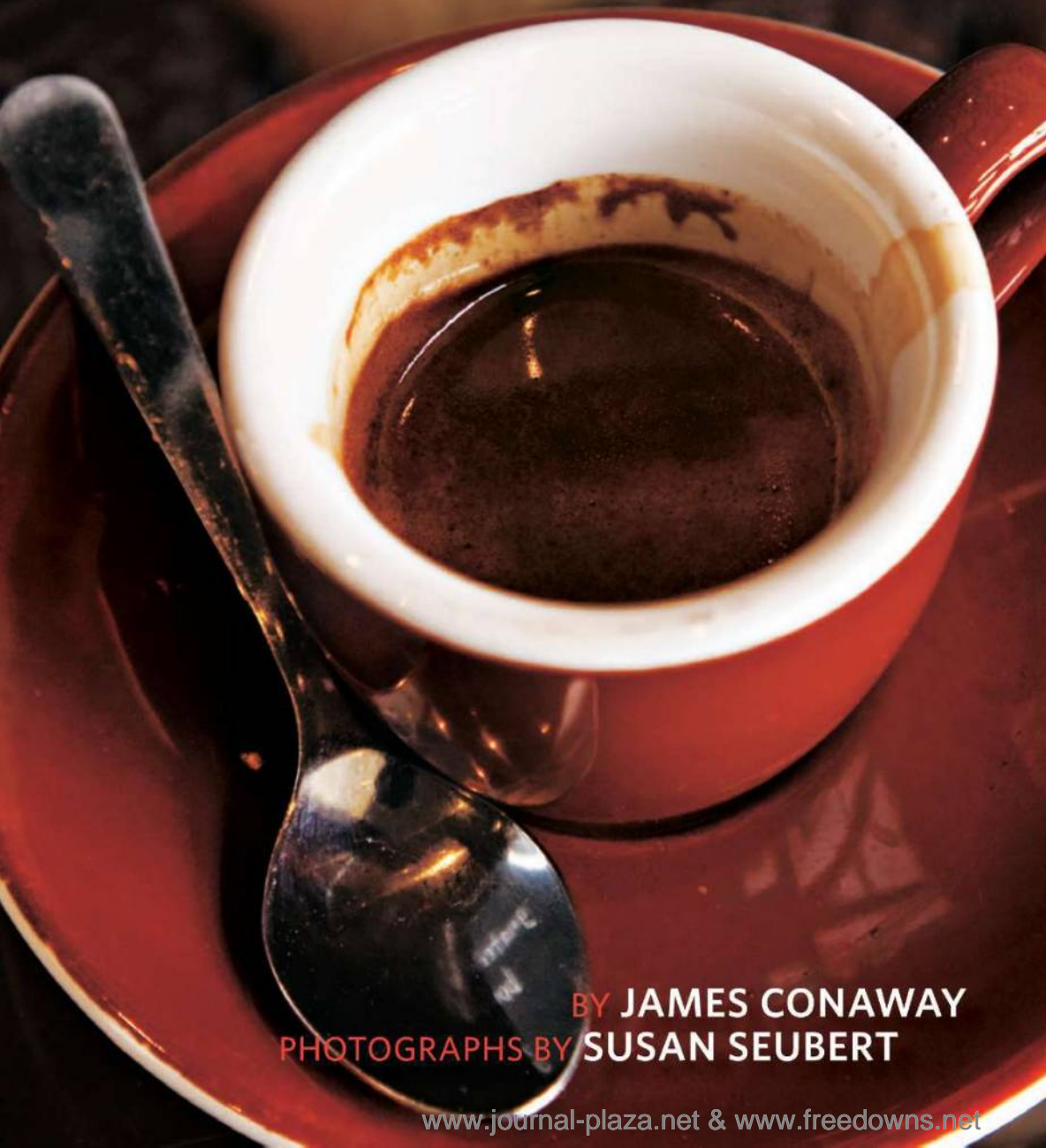
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PORTLAND REIGNS

This Oregon city gets almost everything right: It's friendly, sustainable, accessible, maybe even a model for America's future.



BY JAMES CONAWAY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUSAN SEUBERT

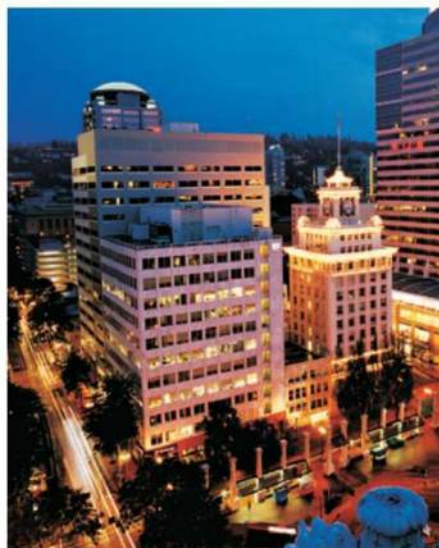
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When it rains in Portland, simply duck into a coffee shop, say, Stumptown, for an espresso (*opposite*) or into a café such as Laughing Planet for a bite of lunch. "The velvet portrait of Frank Zappa is classic Portland," notes photographer Susan Seubert.





THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO ESPECIALLY WELL IN

Portland, Oregon, and they're all important: eating, drinking, and getting around. Here in the self-proclaimed "city that works," restaurants pride themselves on their fresh, locally grown fare, and you're never far from inspired coffee or innovative brewpub beers. What's more, few cities in the United States are as bicycle friendly. Add to this the ubiquitous local art and a widespread recycling ethic, and you've hit upon much of what makes this verdant, forward-thinking city of 575,930 so appealing.

Portland is so thoroughly trendy these days that at times it seems, well, retro. It's among just a handful of American cities that have managed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Friendliness and civic involvement thrive here even as they decline elsewhere. The downtown farmers market on Park Avenue is jammed every Saturday morning with shoppers dedicated to buying organically grown arugula, Willamette Valley hazelnuts, and artisanal cheeses while listening to bluegrass and folk music. People live in town and in the suburbs, but farmland around the city has been preserved; and skiing and surfing are little more than an hour away.

Portland is all about sustainable, low-impact living, including getting from here to there. So I climb aboard a shiny red bike in the Southeast section of town and angle west toward the Willamette River, through a loose network of neighborhoods both funky and high-end. The bike's long, raised

handlebars elicit appreciative bell tinkles from other riders. By the time I reach the river, it's raining. Ah, Portland.

As often happens in this city, there's a place nearby where I can have a meal—in this case, the little Produce Row Cafe, set amid warehouses. The rain stops as I finish my beer-battered fries, and I mount up again and take the riverside bike trail north. The path follows the fast-flowing Willamette in its last northward stretch before its confluence with the more powerful Columbia River. I steer away from the water toward Mississippi Avenue, where I find a Laughing Planet Café, one in a local chain, whose owner—former bike shop proprietor Richard Satnick—wears Bermudas and a New York Yankees cap.

"I realized Portland was home within 20 minutes of first arriving and riding around on my folding bicycle," the ex-New Yorker says. Satnick, struck by the "wonderfully cohesive neighborhoods," decided

Portland is a model city, showing "how it has to go if we're to survive as a nation."

Every day, cyclists make more than 16,700 trips across Portland's four bridges, says Roger Geller, bicycle coordinator for the city government. Geller's trim white beard and straw hat stand out as he pedals his old two-wheeled "beater" to city hall. He's one of the 8 percent of Portlanders who usually bike to work. "Bicycles succeed here because we've built the facilities—bike lanes, parking places—and our distances are relatively short."

Local tourism agencies are in sync, offering cycling tours. And then there are some 4,000 organized bike rides each year, including one in which riders pedal "as bare as you dare," says Geller. Doesn't public nudity violate a city ordinance? I ask. "Yes," Geller says, "but what can you do with 5,000 naked people on bicycles?" Now that's Portland.

Every year the PedalPalooza festival hosts 270 events over 17 days; on Fridays, a supportive citizenry hands riders free pastries and mugs of coffee as they pedal past. Cyclist types range from Zoobombers—punks racing madly downhill—to cyclocross racers, who pedal up steps and over barriers, to a female dance troupe called the Sprockettes. One participant adapted a bike into a machine for making daiquiris.

An unusual contraption dear to many Portlanders is the "tall" bike, which consists of one bike frame welded atop another, with vertical and horizontal chain drives and a seat six feet high. "You have

Clockwise from top, left: Fashion meets art each month on First Thursday, when gallery receptions draw upscale hipsters. The skyline glows in this view from Departure, a restaurant that opened in March atop The Nines Hotel. Locals shop for organic veggies at the Saturday farmers market, while scenes of utter tranquillity await at the Japanese Garden. "The garden is lush no matter what time of year you visit," says Susan Seubert.





to kick it off,” says Michael Jones, demonstrating, “like a scooter, and then hop on.”

Red-bearded, energetic, the technology director of a small social media company, Jones prefers the moniker “transportationalist” to “young modern,” a common reference to thirtysomethings drawn to Portland. He owns six bicycles of various sorts, plus five unicycles—one of which he rode 50 miles to the beach—but at the moment he’s making an arc in the middle of 4th Avenue in Southwest. A block away, I can see “the carts,” kitchens on wheels that serve good Eastern European, Thai, Mexican, and other ethnic cuisines out of trailers to a hungry midday workforce.

“Tall bikes have the same appeal as SUVs,” Jones calls out. “You can see over things. Stopping is the problem. You have to get off, or put your foot on a lamppost, or”—he laughs—“on a car roof.”

TO NAVIGATE PORTLAND, BY BIKE OR otherwise, you have to master some basic geography. First, imagine the Willamette River neatly cleaving the city, south to north, with the northwest and southwest (home of the city’s downtown) sectors on one side, the north, northeast, and southeast sectors on the other.

The east-west dividing line, which extends to both sides of the river, is Burnside Street. Forest Park, a 5,156-acre urban retreat, gives the city’s western horizon a wild, deeply green aspect.

In 1903, John Charles Olmsted designed a system of open spaces for Portland so it could accommodate rapid population growth. Parkland took on an intrinsic value, as did relatively small city blocks and building plots, office buildings of limited height, and broad sidewalks that would encourage vibrant street life.

And thanks to former governor Tom McCall, Portland also has an outer greenbelt, one of many in the state. Back in the late ’60s, Governor McCall challenged every community in Oregon to come up with a plan for controlled growth and to establish no-build greenbelts to limit sprawl. These belts redirected growth back into the cities instead of onto farmland, emphasizing density over trophy houses—and helping to empower communities. A proposed interstate highway that would have wiped out whole neighborhoods, for example, was defeated. Money went into a light-rail system and other public transport.

Nowadays, in new developments, shops are built at street level with apartments and condos above, reflecting a European

model. Environmental sensitivity has become part of Portland’s social fabric.

Portland’s Tom McCall Waterfront Park honors his legacy. The park’s sinuous green ribbon draws walkers, skaters, bikers, and some sleepers; and on a clear day, it provides a glorious full-on view of the snow-creased mass of Mount Hood in the distance.

But of all the city’s extensive green spaces, my favorite is the Portland Japanese Garden in Washington Park in Southwest. The garden provides a transformative descent into the intricacies of the spiritual landscape. “What makes a good Japanese garden is the placement of stones, shrubs,

trees, and water to emphasize the subtle asymmetry of nature,” says Diane Durston, the garden’s curator of culture and art.

Durston and I move from the Stroll Garden—one of five blending seamlessly, this one populated by colorful koi finning under the Moon Bridge—to the Natural Garden, a wondrously realistic mimicry of waterfalls and sylvan paths bordered by smooth stones and Japanese maples, engendering repose in everyone who pauses to look. The Portland Japanese Garden manages to accommodate 200,000 visitors a year without losing its air of remoteness and discovery.

“I feel like I’m in the warm sunshine

Clockwise from below, left: Native Americans continue a cultural tradition by selling salmon at the farmers market. A young woman strolls past a train warehouse turned town house row in the gentrified Pearl District, also home to Tanner Springs Park, a block-square downtown wetlands. Opposite: Thousands of cyclists cross the Willamette each day via the Hawthorne Bridge.



of Japan,” adds Durston, who lived for 18 years in Kyoto and chose Portland on her return to the U.S. “because the city’s so rich in cultural and natural assets, and because it tries to be conscious of future generations.”

I TRADE THE TRANQUIL JAPANESE Garden for the busy streets of “The Pearl,” epicenter of Portland’s thriving art scene. This gentrified warehouse district brims with restaurants, cafés, and upscale chain stores, as well as Portland’s legendary bookseller, Powell’s. On the first Thursday of the month, a crowd of art lovers moves at a measured pace from gallery to gallery. Everett Street has edgy, electronic offerings, such as the interactive art exhibited at ON Gallery, while the streets around the Pacific Northwest College of Art are dense with middlebrow landscape paintings, sculpture, and crafts of all sorts, from cast temple bells to knives made from motorcycle chains.



The creative arts are a way “to explore environmental issues and to inform people about specific landscapes,” Tom Webb tells me. Webb, the editor of *The Bear Deluxe Magazine*, grew up in Portland and remembers “when people were leaving, not arriving.” The timber industry had crashed, and so had the job market. “But when quality of life became an issue in this country, the Portland renaissance started. Now we all want to maintain the city’s livability.”

The gawkers—and buyers—on the Pearl’s First Thursday may live in expensive condos overlooking Jamison Square, a handsome local park, but more come from highly individualistic neighborhoods in other sectors of the city connected to

the center by light-rail. Lovely, Czech-designed trolleys trundle over rails in a modern mode of travel reminiscent of an earlier age. There’s bus service, too.

I arrive at the northern edge of the Pearl District to take a seat in Portland’s old Armory for some lively evening entertainment.

“It’s... it’s...”

“*Live Wire!*” screams the audience, in response to a card held aloft on stage by the prompter, filling the old stone fortress with an enthusiasm that makes *Prairie Home Companion* fans seem blasé. Recorded here in the Gerding Theater—a stunning architectural redesign of concrete, steel, and glass—*Live Wire* will be broadcast later on Oregon public radio.

The audience is fashionably eclectic—spiffy grunge to quasi-professorial—but mostly just relaxed and warmly responsive to jokes, a performance artist, the mellow Portland Cello Project, and homegrown alt-rock band, the Dandy Warhols.

At intermission, people make straight for the state-of-the-art espresso machine in the lobby, which also features interactive monitors and a Wi-Fi system. Tim DuRoche, the theater’s community programs manager, ticks off the building’s environmental street creds: “the only sustainable theater renovation in the country with a LEED Platinum certification by the U.S. Green Building Council; an outdoor ‘bio-swale’ landscaped with native species; irrigation by captured rainwater, which also feeds the minimum-flush toilets. These [features] give people things to think about.” DuRoche, a multitallented chap dressed in black shirt and charcoal jacket, also reviews restaurants and dance performances and plays drums in a jazz

band, “including sustainability, good air quality, and smart design.”

Included in tonight’s printed program for *Live Wire* is a “Green Cleaning Guide” foldout. References to environmental concerns throughout the show get the biggest applause. Sustainability, it seems, is not just a mantra here—it’s a social imperative.

Next day, I’m introduced to another version of Portland’s creativity in the Mississippi Avenue neighborhood, at the ReBuilding Center, a cavernous repository of used building parts and materials of every imaginable description. The exterior is a medley of whimsical mega-sculptures made of found objects, but inside it’s all business: lumber, plumbing fixtures, barn siding, doors, flooring, railings, shutters, bathtubs—in short, a universe of building remnants turned into a \$3-million-a-year business and a sight no visitor should miss, both for its astounding variety and variation on the Portland ethic.

“We employ 45 people and move eight tons of product a day back into structures housing Portlanders,” says the founder, Shane Endicott, burning with conviction in his old T-shirt. “The idea is to take what society says is waste and turn it around so it can be used.”

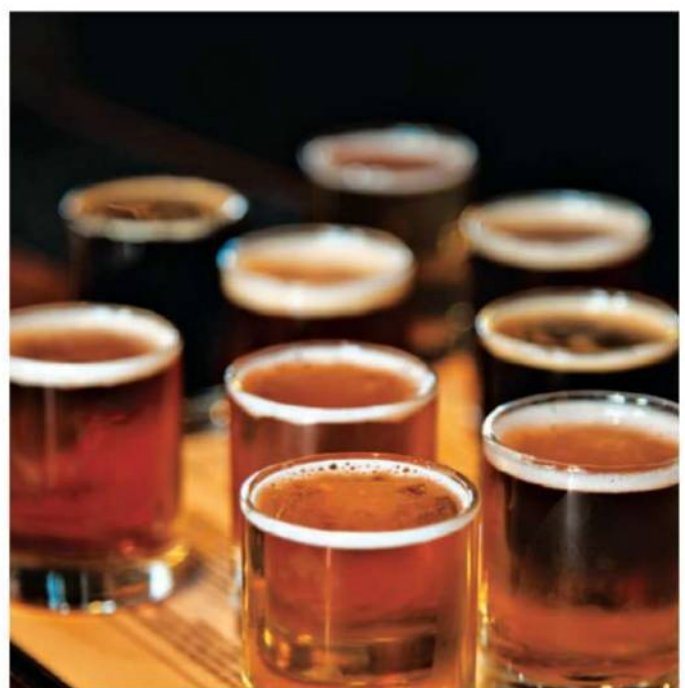
His goal, he says, “is to create a non-profit model that can be given away to other places.” It’s included in the itineraries of visiting VIPs “from New Orleans to Kosovo. It’s really the small stuff like this that will save society, not technological breakthroughs. People all over the world want to see what we do and how we do it. We let them hang out and learn these skills.”

April Melnick, a 32-year-old artist and clothing designer who works as a barista for Stumptown Coffee Roasters, knows something about good water—and the other ingredients that make for a stellar brew: “The beans here are a mixture of Latin American, African, and Indonesian. The blend changes every year, depending upon the harvest,” although the exact mixture is tantamount to a state secret.

Stumptown is a homegrown coffee roaster that started on Division Street in Southeast and now has five locations around town. From these emanate the satisfying whoosh behind a crema or a soy latte and the aroma of Stumptown’s unique, mahogany-hued brew wafting into the subconscious of anyone within nosing distance. Melnick and I are in the Stumptown café attached to the Ace Hotel, in Southwest. We pass into the lobby



Clockwise from above: Chef Naomi Pomeroy confers with her daughter, August, while setting out a plate at Beast, a casual and friendly prix fixe restaurant in Northeast Portland. At Hopworks, a tray full of "tasters" lets you sample various microbrews before ordering a full pint. A retro-style photo booth in the relaxing Ace Hotel lobby takes credit cards. Opposite: The Sprockettes dance troupe incorporates bicycles into its act.



and sit on a sofa covered in recycled green army surplus ponchos, listening to the chatter of a manual coffee grinder.


"Stumptown is fast-paced," Melnick says, "but you learn to pull the perfect shot on a beautiful Mistral machine, which has lots of controls." Jobs like hers are highly sought after by young creatives who want time off to go to the beach or to one of the many handy mountains for hiking, skiing, and snowboarding or just to stay home and work on their own projects, which, in Melnick's case, are fashion shows put on by boutique designers.

Our cups rest on a big industrial door turned coffee table that might have come straight from the ReBuilding Center. The Ace Hotel may not be strictly sustainable, but it tries, with bookshelves full of used volumes of Johnson, Tolstoy, Wilde, and Bret Hart. The rooms upstairs are decorated in the latest in eco-chic: pipe fixtures to hold the toilet paper, recycled paint buckets for wastebaskets, custom-made, pure wool Pendleton blankets on frameless beds. The hotel traffic is mostly young, hip, and apparently happy in cut-offs, porkpie hats, and long chains, with not a tucked-in shirt in sight.

The lobby feeds into the Clyde Common restaurant next door, which is part of the scene, a kind of moveable feast where customers dine well together at big tables, and the bar offers everything from homemade, nonalcoholic lemon-ginger and lavender sodas to absinthe, that formerly forbidden fin-de-siècle libation served mixed with water—which turns it cloudy—poured from a vintage silver dispenser.

SUSTAINABILITY, LIKE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, is admirable, I'm thinking, but can highly competitive businesses like gourmet restaurants, coffee shops, and brewpubs toe this line? Leaving Stumptown, the Ace, and Clyde Common, I head to the Hopworks Urban Brewery, on Powell Street in Southeast, to sample Portland's favorite drink: the microbrew.

I take a seat at the bar, which has a trellis of lovely old bike frames strung overhead. The spigots for draft beer made on the premises are designed to look like Allen wrenches, and banana bike seats decorate the men's room. Owner Christian Ettinger, who wears hiking shorts and sneakers, tells me he "didn't do a marketing study because I'm just passionate about the outdoors, beer, pizza, and bicycles. I thought there had to be people in Portland who would want to put them all together,



Intelligent Travel: Portland, Oregon

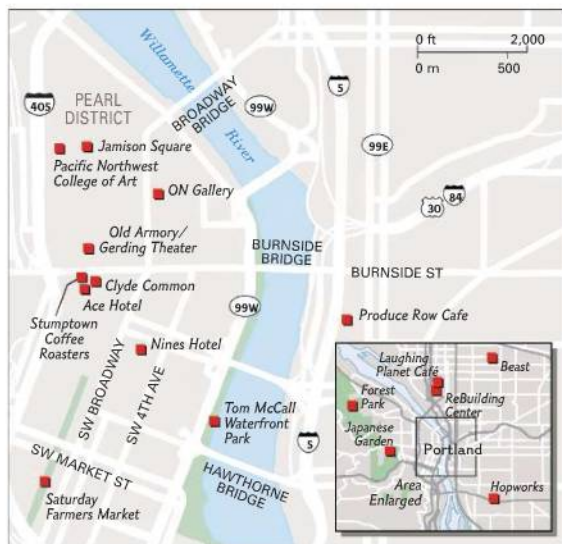
THE BASICS
Portland, Oregon, is on Pacific standard time. The area code is 503 unless otherwise noted.

PLACES MENTIONED
Ace Hotel 1022 S.W. Stark St.; 228-2277; www.acehotel.com/portland.
Beast 5425 N.E. 30th Ave.; 841-6968; www.beastpdx.com.
Clyde Common 1014 S.W. Stark St.; 228-3333; www.clydecommon.com.
Departure 525 S.W. Morrison St.; 802-5370;

www.departureportland.com.
First Thursday Gallery Walk N.W. 23rd St. and the Pearl; 295-4979; www.firstthursdayportland.com.
Gerding Theater at the Armory 128 N.W. 11th Ave.; 445-3700; www.pcs.org.
Hopworks Urban Brewery 2944 S.E. Powell Blvd.; 232-4677; www.hopworksbeer.com.
Laughing Planet Café 3765 N. Mississippi Ave. (and five other locations); 467-4146; www.laughingplanetcafe.com.
Nines Hotel 525 S.W. Morrison St.; 877-229-9995.

ON Gallery 321 N.W. 6th Ave. #101; 313-5379; <http://ongallery.org>.
Pacific Northwest College of Art 1241 N.W. Johnson St.; 226-4391; www.pnca.edu.
Powell's City of Books 1005 W. Burnside St. (and four other locations); 800-878-7323; www.powells.com.
Portland Farmers Markets (five markets at various locations on various days of the week); 241-0032; www.portlandfarmersmarket.org.
Portland Japanese Garden 611 S.W. Kingston Ave.; 223-1321; www.japanesegarden.com.
Produce Row Cafe 204 S.E. Oak St.; 232-8355; www.producerowcafe.com.
ReBuilding Center 3625 N. Mississippi Ave.; 331-1877; www.rebuildingcenter.org.
Stumptown Coffee Roasters 1026 S.W. Stark St. (and four other locations); 224-9060; www.stumptowncoffee.com.
Tanner Springs Park N.W. 10th Ave. and Marshall St.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Travel Portland www.travelportland.com.
Bike Portland <http://bikeportland.org>.
Shift PedalPalooza and other events; www.shift2bikes.org.



and the response has been incredible."

Hopworks' west parking lot is made of permeable pavers. Rainwater feeds old metal kegs sawed in half to serve as planters for native species of grasses and flowers. The burners under the brewery's kettles are fueled with biodiesel, as is Ettinger's old silver VW Golf. The fuel includes "SVO"—straight vegetable oil—from Hopworks' own fries cooker.

The refrigeration here is high-efficiency, and the furniture is made of recycled wood with low volatile organic compounds in all the finishes.

"The main thing," Ettinger goes on, "is that you're criticizing convention every step of the way. Hopworks is the first eco-brewpub making certified organic beer, and it serves only local produce in the restaurant. Initially it was more expensive

to do all this, but the long-term paybacks mean real money."

Meanwhile, 62 people get to work in an attractive setting, serving customers with something ineffable in common. "Portland revolves around things that are thoughtful," Ettinger says in that quiet moment before Hopworks throws open its doors to the noontime pedaling public. "We're just local people trying to make a living responsibly, doing something we love."

Contributing editor **James Conaway** wrote about London in our March special issue on cities. Photographer **Susan Seubert**, a Portlander since 1988, says the city's farmers markets are among the nation's best.

Portland Photo Gallery: See more pictures from this feature article at traveler.nationalgeographic.com/photography.



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by MELINA GEROSA BELLOWS
photographs by ANNIE GRIFFITHS BELT

in search

An incredible journey on the wings of



Warmed by the sun,
monarch butterflies
—among more than
1 billion that migrate
here annually—spontaneously take flight
in the boreal forests
of Central Mexico.

of magic

butterflies.

November/December 2009 83

www.journal-plaza.net & www.freedowns.net

My butterfly obsession

began in a yoga class. My body was jackknifed in the downward dog pose. But my mind was far, far away, in the Central Mexican states of México and Michoacán. The area's boreal forests are the winter haven for more than a billion monarchs. The entire story line of a novel downloaded itself into my brain as if my muse simply pressed her "Send" button. My imagination invented a protagonist whose mission would be to save this endangered place, and because she's dying, she has less than a year to do it.

After that yoga class, I started to notice butterflies everywhere. Fluttering down city streets in the winter, intricately tattooed on women's bodies, even appearing in my own children's artwork. The butterflies were speaking to me. So I started writing.

Three years, four drafts, and hundreds of research hours later, I decided to retreat from fiction into reality and actually visit what would eventually appear in my novel—the Kingdom of the Monarchs, a 60-square-mile area in Central Mexico's volcanic highlands. Gamely, my imaginary heroine and I set off to a remote, ethereal place that monarch expert Dr. Lincoln Brower once called the Eighth Wonder of the World.

I AM ROLLING THROUGH MEXICO City, its sleekly modern skyscrapers giving way to neighborhoods of Spanish-style mansions with flowering purple jacaranda trees and then bucolic countryside fecund with peach and avocado orchards. I con-

tinue through a string of towering active volcanoes. I learn that the locals make a yearly pilgrimage to dance and offer flowers, clay artifacts, and turkey blood to keep the snowy-peaked Nevado de Toluca volcano quiet.

Several hours later I reach my first destination, the tiny former mining town of Angangueo in Michoacán. This traditional village has cobblestone streets and white stucco buildings with red-tiled roofs. No one speaks English.

After a quick hotel lunch at Plaza Don Gabino—fish roasted in cornhusks, home-

made tortillas, and the creamiest guacamole on Earth—my butterfly safari begins.

I climb into an open-air truck, which begins a steep ascent up the mountain. I pass homes with outdoor birdcages, pots of red and pink geraniums, and freshly washed baby clothes drying on tree branches. Little kids kick a ball, and an old lady throws rocks (big ones!) at a pack of scuffling dogs.

Of the four monarch sanctuaries open to the public, I'll visit three. From the entrance of my first, El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary, 129 miles west of Mexico City, I begin the hour-long hike up. The air is thin and getting thinner.

I pass other visitors on their way down.

"Worth it!" they say, jubilantly.

A Mexican grandmother stops to inform me in hand gestures that a butterfly landed on her hat.

The scent of pine increases the higher I climb. The color of the trees and wildflowers seems to deepen. As I approach 10,000 feet, I'm exhilarated but breathless.

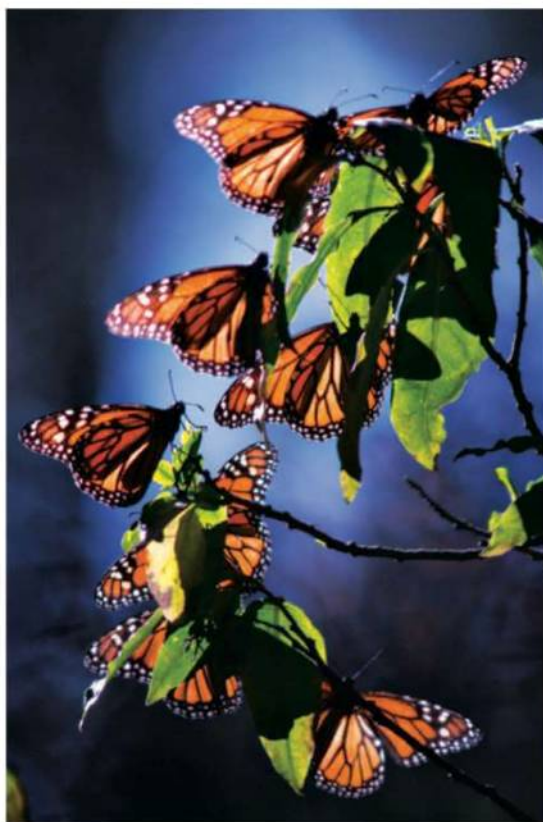
The intensity of the experience recalls another ritual, the tradition of hand-copying 278 Japanese characters before being granted access to Kyoto's moss garden. Both exercises serve as a meditation, purifying and preparing the mind for the sacred experience to come.

As I hike, I start stripping layers. One, two, three, four, until I'm down to my T-shirt. I'm reminded of how a butterfly develops through four stages—from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to the winged delight that flits around me. I consider the wonder of this metamorphosis and the even more amazing phenomenon of the butterfly's migratory cycle.

For at least 10,000 years, these monarchs—each weighing no more than a fifth of a penny—have traveled as many as 2,500 miles with pinpoint accuracy from the northern United States and Canada to reach a place none of them has ever been. They begin their journey in the fall and remain in Central Mexico all winter. It is now late February and I am here just before lift off—mating is getting into high gear.

I round the corner and the show begins. One butterfly flutters by, and then another and another. I watch as dozens float past, their shadows dancing like polka dots on the dry dirt.

The monarchs are everywhere.





Like a blanket of leaves, countless monarchs cluster on oyamel fir trees at the Sierra Chincua Butterfly Sanctuary. The volcanic highlands (opposite, top) in the state of Michoacán are home to the country's many such sanctuaries. Ninety percent of the roughly 100,000 annual visitors to the region head to the El Rosario sanctuary (opposite, bottom) where, at slightly over 10,000 feet, the monarchs paint the landscape in orange and black.

Hanging on the pines like flat Christmas ornaments and clumping like swollen beehives on the ends of branches. Some evergreens are so covered with butterflies that they resemble maples in the fall. Although a monarch weighs so little, overburdened branches can actually break from the cumulative weight, killing many of those aboard.

Standing on the path mesmerized—I am among about 150 million monarchs—I take in the sound. The whirring is soft, like rain.

A BUTTERFLY LANDS ON MY HIP, opening and closing its wings in the sun. Then another lands on my stomach.

Strangers take photos.

"Es un macho," says my guide Astrid. "You can tell by the two black spots."

Slowly, the male starts walking up my shirt.

"Look out, here he comes!" says an onlooker, as the butterfly reaches my chest.

Before it gets too personal, the monarch takes wing. The onlookers laugh. I feel light, happy, as if I've just been kissed by nature.

Just then, several sweaty local men huff and puff up the hill with a stretcher. They deposit Ida, a 90-year-old from Gulfport, Mississippi, on a rock. She blinks as if she's just been dispatched to the moon.

"I've never seen anything like it," Ida declares in wonder.

One of the most striking things about being in the sanctuary is not the monarchs, but the effect they have on the people here. Young, old, male, female, local, foreigner—everyone is smiling, helpful, friendly. It's as if the butterflies are bringing out the best in human nature.

On the walk down, I'm befriended by a pack of female athletes on their annual visit to the sanctuary from Mexico City. Two of the four carry dogs in their backpacks; a white poodle with a pink bow named Bianca and a Chihuahua named Merlina

with two puppies.

I ask why these cosmopolitan babes keep returning to this quiet place when Mexico has so many playgrounds for the young and beautiful.

"It's a mystical place," says Teresa. "It's healing for the spirit to come here."

Her friend Josefina recites a poem in Spanish, which Teresa translates.

Small volatile souls
That let our imagination fly away
That give us our strength
And feeling of vigor.

I lend Tatiana, who's shivering with cold, my down vest for the descent. She accepts it as naturally as if she were a longtime friend.

"The Aztecs believe that when we die our souls become butterflies," explains Teresa. "All of our ancestors' spirits are still here. You can feel it, and it energizes the soul."



THAT NIGHT I STAY AT THE CLEAN but rustic Posada Don Bruno in Angangueo. None of the hotels in the area has heat, and I've been warned to wear thermal underwear with my pajamas—the temperatures dip below 30 degrees at night.

Our dinner is a buffet of rice, beans, chicken, and cactus, washed down with endless Mexican beer and lemony mountain tea, brewed with limoncillo from the side of the road. After dinner I'm presented with a hot water bottle and retire to a freshly lit fire in my room.

My second day I visit the Sierra Chincua Sanctuary, which is about an hour from the hotel. At the entrance, our group mounts horses, and we make our way through 112-foot-tall white pines, oaks, and firs on a skinny, rutted footpath. The experience is silent and serene. After an hour we dismount to hike the final mile.

Before long, I spot one monarch, then another. As I walk, I see dozens, then hundreds and thousands. The sun is shining and the butterflies are in flight. The experience is otherworldly, like being inside a snow globe with orange glitter. In this one area alone, there are 30 to 50 million monarchs.

Thank!

A threesome lands in my lap with surprising heft. (These fourth-generation monarchs can get quite chubby because of their relatively long lifespan.) One butterfly disentangles itself, and the male yanks the female to a tree to close the deal.

The males vigorously go at it, attacking anything that moves, including other males or fluttering leaves. Once a male latches onto a female, the nuptial dance



can last for as long as eight hours.

They've had time to prepare. Since last fall, these butterflies have been staving off sexual maturity, thanks to the unique environment these forests provide, which is not too hot or cold, wet or dry. They settle and remain motionless—in stasis—until spring and mating. That's when the milkweed grows, creating a surface on which they'll lay their eggs—then becoming food for the caterpillars when they hatch.

Suddenly, the soft pitter-patter of mummering wings increases to the decibel of a loud downpour.

"Mira, una explosión de mariposas!" says our local guide.

I peer into the valley, and the cobalt blue sky turns into a shimmering sheet of orange and black. When the sun has

warmed a large number of butterflies, they simultaneously burst into flight.

"What do you think?" asks Rosemarie, a fellow butterfly watcher. "Did you get what you need for your novel?"

But that's just it, I can't think. My brain has been turned off. Protagonist Shmotagonist. As my jaw hangs open, all I can do is rubberneck. This moment alone is worth enduring cold hotel rooms.

I make a conscious effort to absorb the natural wonder into my soul. Perhaps I can draw on this awesome inspiration later when I'm back in the real world, tackling taxes, stuck in traffic, or taking myself too seriously. Maybe this is why my protagonist and I are here, for an object lesson on how to live life well, no matter what lies in store. I think of French naturalist Marcel Roland's quote that butterflies give us "solace for the pain of living."

BUT IF EVERY SILVER LINING HAS A cloud, here it's the shabbily clothed children who are begging who I encounter when I return my horse at the bottom of the mountain.

There is much poverty in the region, and to survive many locals have turned to illegal logging to make ends meet. Now the great migratory phenomenon is endangered because of habitat destruction, which could threaten the butterflies' survival. The thinner the forests become due

Children await the monarchs in the tiny Piedra Herrada sanctuary. Opposite: Like luxuriant hanging gardens, these monarchs are among 150 million butterflies that flutter into the El Rosario sanctuary each year. Top: A butterfly-free moment in the tiny town of Angangueo.



to logging, the more vulnerable the monarchs. In 2002, a single winter storm wiped out 70 percent of the overwintering population, which were left piled two feet high on the forest floor.

Still, it's hard for locals to care about the monarchs when their families are hungry. Logging is lucrative, and the farmers want to use the land to raise crops.

The Mexican government has sent federal marshals to thwart the illegal logging. And it has made serious efforts to involve local communities in conservation. Farmers are incentivized not to log their property. Instead they gain financially from reforestation efforts. "It's as complicated as fighting drugs," admits our local guide, Astrid.

AS WE APPROACH OUR FINAL SANCTUARY, the butterflies meet us on the way. We pass the *policía*. A cop is holding what I think is a radar gun.

"Actually it's a video camera," says Astrid, laughing. "He's filming the butterflies."

The State of Mexico pays the police to enforce the nine-mile-per-hour speed limit near the sanctuary. Killing even one butterfly incurs a fine of 500 pesos (\$38.50), so people take the prohibition seriously.

At the Piedra Herrada sanctuary we mount our horses for the steepest climb yet. The day is sunny, and hordes of uniformed schoolchildren are also undertaking the journey. Single file, our sure-footed *caballos* lurch onward, and then we dismount to hike down a steep precipice to a tiny dirt patch on the mountainside.

Although this roost is smaller than the previous two, I'm mid-canopy, putting me eye level with a butterfly-covered oyamel fir. The sun hits a branch and, majestically, a shawl of butterflies shakes itself out into a thousand flying tigers.

I hear a gentle rustle over my head. I look up to witness another explosion; this one looks as if a popcorn machine is spewing mounds of butterflies into the air. The sights are spectacular, but our time here is limited. We must relinquish our perch so the schoolchildren can have their turn.

As we descend, I am struck that we are the only tourists here despite the fact that Mexico is emerging as a popular ecotourism destination. And while the country still has much to do to preserve the butterfly habitat, in the last ten years Mexico



A butterfly finds some solitude on the brim of a tourist's hat. The best time to see these creatures is from late February to early March.

has tripled its acreage of protected areas.

The efforts appear to be working. Illegal logging has dropped 48 percent since 2008; close to four million trees have been planted, and in November 2008 UNESCO declared the 139,019-acre Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve a World Heritage site. Ecotourism, it's clear, can benefit not just the monarchs but the locals whose welfare is dependent on their willingness to protect the creatures. As I leave the park, my vehicle snorkels through a sea of butterflies. We

stop once more on the roadside for a final opportunity to visit the monarchs that have flown down the mountain to drink the salt and minerals from the mud puddles.

I watch as a young girl in a blue school uniform crouches down to closely observe a populated puddle. A butterfly surprises her by hopping aboard her finger. Her friend snaps a picture with her cell phone, and the two girls giggle in wonder.

And there it is, the magic I've come to find. It's not the

moment I thought I'd experience, a sudden clarity about my own life, or even a plot twist for my protagonist. Rather, it's a reminder that joy is contagious, we're all connected, and that Mother Nature has a healing, salubrious effect on human nature.

Melina Gerosa Bellows is the editor in chief of National Geographic Kids; her first novel is Wish. Photographer Annie Griffiths Belt is the author of A Camera, Two Kids, and a Camel.

Butterfly Photo Gallery: You can view more pictures from this assignment at <http://traveler.nationalgeographic.com/photography>.



Intelligent Travel: Central Mexico

THE BASICS

Entry requirements U.S. citizens need a valid passport to enter Mexico and to re-enter the U.S. **Time** The states of México and Michoacán are located in Mexico's Central Time Zone and are one hour behind eastern standard time. **Currency** The Mexican peso (MXN); for conversion rates, visit www.oanda.com **Phone calls** For the U.S., dial 011, the country code—52—the local area code, and the number.

PLACES MENTIONED

Hotel Plaza Don Gabino
Morelos No. 147 Angangueo,
Michoacán, CP 61411 Mexico
715 156 0322
Posado Don Bruno, Morelos
No. 92 Angangueo, Michoacán,
Mexico 715 156 0026
Sierra Chincua Sanctuary,
Angangueo, Michoacán, Mexico
Piedra Herrada Sanctuary,
Los Saucos, State of México
722 107 9032
(Spanish language only)

El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary,
Sierra El Campanario, Angangueo,
Michoacán, Mexico

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mexico Tourism http://www.visitmexico.com/wb/Visitmexico/Visi_Home?show=regions.
Natural Habitat Adventures Tour Operator
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The sun glistens off Lake Tahoe as you ski down the mountain. The snowflakes fall softly as you sip your hot cocoa. This is Nevada.

18. VILLAGE OF RUIDOSO NEW MEXICO

Recharge your spirit this fall in the inspiring mountains of Ruidoso, New Mexico — the perfect mountain playground full of exciting outdoor adventure.

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20. ARIZONA. THE GRAND CANYON STATE: 866-236-1520

21. CHANDLER, AZ OFFICE OF TOURISM: 888-663-2489

22. HOTEL VALLEY HO: 866-882-4484

23. KINGMAN POWERHOUSE VISITOR CENTER: 866-427-6303

24. PHOENIX: 877-CALL PHX

25. ROYAL PALMS RESORT AND SPA: 888-654-8661

26. SCOTTSDALE CVB: 800-419-3601

27. SHERATON WILD HORSE PASS RESORT & SPA: 888-218-8989

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30. THE BOULDERS RESORT & GOLDEN DOOR SPA: 888-579-2631

31. THE WESTIN KIERLAND RESORT & SPA: 800-354-5892

32. TUCSON CVB: 800-638-8350

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33. CARLSBAD - BEACH TERRACE INN: 800-433-5415

34. MORRO BAY - DISCOVER YOUR BETTER NATURE: 800-231-0592

35. OCEANSIDE - COASTAL SAN DIEGO HOTEL DISCOUNTS: 800-350-7873

36. VENTURA - A REAL CALIFORNIA ADVENTURE: 800-483-6204

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37. CEDAR CITY / BRIAN HEAD, UT: 800-354-4849

38. LYNNWOOD TOURISM, WA: 425-670-5040

39. SNOHOMISH COUNTY, WA: 888-338-0976

40. ZION COUNTRY ACTION TOURS, UT: 888-848-9228

Heritage, Culture, & Cuisine (circle 200)

41. ALBUQUERQUE CVB, NM: 800-284-2282

42. ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION, CO: 800-679-3153

43. BOYNTON BEACH CRA, FL

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46. FONTAINEBLEAU MIAMI BEACH: 877-446-4213

47. GEORGIA DEPT. OF ECONOMICAL DEVELOPMENT: 800-VISITGA

48. HOTEL TEATRO, CO: 888-727-1200

49. LAKELAND AREA CVB, FL

50. NORTH CAROLINA: 800-VISIT-NC

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52. SNOMASS, CO

53. TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT: 800-GO2-TENN

54. THE KINSEY COLLECTION AT THE BROGAN MUSEUM, FL: 850-513-0700

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56. WASHINGTON, DC: 800-422-8644

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Pristine beaches, thrilling watersports, rich history, exciting nightlife, luxurious resorts. Dominican Republic has it all.

Transportation (circle 502)

59. ALASKA AND MARINE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

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Travel the World (circle 503)

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Norwegian Epic sails the Eastern and Western Caribbean from Miami starting summer 2010, but bookings are available right now.

WINTER WONDERLAND

Grab your gear and pack your bag—it's wintertime in the mountains! From skiing, snowboarding, and dogsledding to spas, restaurants, galleries, and theaters, the country's hottest winter destinations are calling your name. There's something for everyone, so come out and explore the bounty of America's winter playground.

THERE'S NOTHING HERE

Just like yesterday. You skied all day. Came back to the remnants of a fire, sat down and took your boots off. It felt warm inside the cabin. Warmer once wine had been served. Dinner can wait. Last night's experience says the light will hit the mountains for only a few minutes and it's best enjoyed simply. **MONTANA** WINTERMT.COM



MONTANA

Here, scenic trails outnumber freeways and small towns are still going strong. Exhilaration comes alive in the form of deep snow, geothermal geysers, alpine peaks, and glacier-fed backcountry lakes all in a landscape that's still wild—roamed by bison, elk, and other humbling creatures.

Wintry Whims

People often think of floating through deep powder at one of the state's 16 ski areas—yet the options for wintry experiences in Montana are as vast as the Rocky Mountain landscape and the big blue above. Strap on a pair of snowshoes or take off on cross-country skis. Mush a team of sled dogs or try some off-season fly-fishing, followed by a soak in one of the state's numerous natural hot springs.

Natural Majesty

Tap into Yellowstone National Park's winter energy: Watch world-famous geysers and bubbling hot spots against a backdrop of sparkling white. Or enter into the solitude of Glacier National Park to witness snow-frosted peaks—no wonder it's called "The Crown of the Continent."

Altitude Adjustment

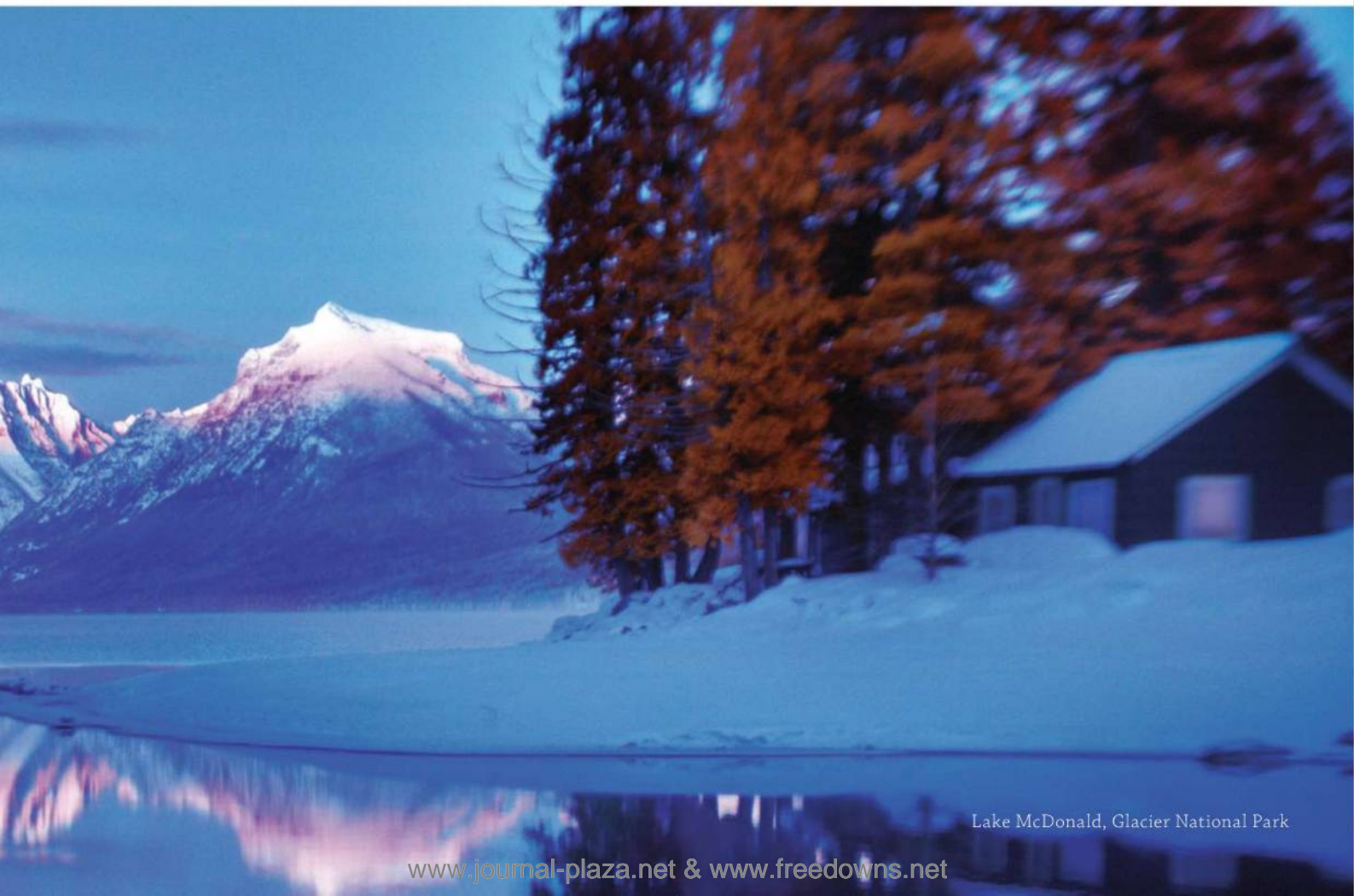
Folks here have fun after frolicking in the snow—whether strolling down one of Montana's classic main streets, meeting up with a few friendly locals, seeking out that perfect steak, or staying in an off-the-beaten-path log cabin. Come to Montana and engage in a unique winter adventure.

Visit wintermt.com for more information on winter activities in Montana.



Above: Bison at Yellowstone National Park.

Left: Bluebird day at Whitefish Mountain Resort. Photograph by Chuck Haney



Lake McDonald, Glacier National Park



Cross-country snow-shoeing in Colorado.

Skiing in Colorado.

❄️ COLORADO

As the temperature drops, Colorado's outdoor activities heat up. Each of the state's 26 renowned ski areas and resorts offers unique terrain, specialized programs, off-slope activities, and a culture all its own. Colorado's ski resorts are usually the first to open and the last to close.

Powder Play

Colorado's dry air and high elevation make its powder snow some of the best in the world. With an average 300 inches of snowfall and 300 days of sunshine a year, you can soak in the sun while you tear up the slopes. If you're not into skiing or boarding, there's always snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, dogsledding, or sleigh rides. It's one of the few places where you can

hit the ski slopes in the morning and play a round of golf in the afternoon.

Unplug and Unwind

Off the slopes, indulge in Colorado's cool mountain-town culture. Enjoy après-ski with a Colorado craft beer or an award-winning wine from one of the state's many wineries, hit the hottest restaurant or nightclub, take in a concert or festival, relax in a spa or natural hot spring, or enjoy the many art galleries and shopping experiences.

Special Rates

Numerous vacation packages and deals are available throughout Colorado, including discounts on lift tickets, lodging, rentals, restaurants, and much more. For details, go to HOTDEALSCOLORADO.COM.

For information visit COLORADO.COM or call 1-800-COLORADO.

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AND WHAT SKIING SHOULD TRULY BE.

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Heavenly Mountain Resort.
Photograph by Corey Rich

❄ NEVADA

A premier destination known for offering the biggest and best of everything, Nevada is also one of the country's top winter hot spots. Less than 90 minutes from the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, Lake Tahoe boasts the largest concentration of ski and snowboarding spots in North America, with 18 downhill resorts,



Heavenly Mountain Resort. Photograph by Corey Rich

seven cross-country resorts, 24,000 acres of snow, and more than a hundred lifts. Off the slopes you can dogsled, cruise the lake, explore eclectic shops, relax at a resort spa, and, of course, enjoy the casino and entertainment only Lake Tahoe can offer.



Heavenly Mountain Resort offers a new organic menu in all of its restaurants.

New Highlights

This winter, Heavenly Resort goes organic, providing "good food on a grand scale." You'll find natural, hormone-free meats and poultry and organic dairy products served in all seven of its mountain restaurants. At Mount Rose's Slide Lodge, opening this winter, indulge in signature food while enjoying panoramic views of the Washoe Valley 4,000 feet below.

Beginner Ski Special

Learn to ski or board at Diamond Peak Resort in Incline Village for only \$25. Available Dec. 12-13 only, ages seven and up, the package includes lift ticket, group lesson, and rental equipment. The Resort also boasts the nationally recognized Bee Ferrato Child Ski Center for children ages three to seven, which this year celebrates 20 years of getting kids on skis.

Check out TravelNevada.com or NVski.mobi from your mobile phone for exclusive Ski-and-Stay packages and ski resort details.

LET NEVADA CAPTURE YOUR HEART



Lake Tahoe, Nevada

Whether you snowshoe up the canyon to get a bird's eye view of the largest alpine lake in North America, discover an intimate lakeside bistro, define your perfect shopping experience, snowmobile up 10,000 feet of unspoiled terrain in the Ruby Mountains or enjoy the bounty of Lake Tahoe's 18 world-class ski resorts – all of which take place in more than 300 inches of snow and 300 days of sunshine annually – you too will find Nevada capturing your heart.

Plan your Winter Getaway at **TravelNevada.com/ngt**
and order your FREE Nevada Visitor's Package. 800.NEVADA.8



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Lone Mountain Ranch sleigh ride. Photography by Andy Watson

❄️ BIG SKY, Montana

With more than 400 inches of annual snow and the "Biggest Skiing in America," Big Sky Resort and sister resort Moonlight Basin deliver thrills and chills both on and off the slopes. Offering everything from snow sports and rejuvenating spas to

superb dining and entertainment, you'll find it all at Big Sky.

Adrenaline Rush

A stunning ride to the North Summit Snowfield on the Lone Peak Tram offers expert skiers the opportunity to tear up some of the most challenging terrain in the U.S. Runs up to six miles long,

5,512 skiable acres, and 4,350 vertical feet are accessible via the Big Sky/Moonlight Basin interconnect. At the summit, sightseers can enjoy breathtaking views.

Chill Out

Enjoy live bands, ski movies, and family fun when the sun goes down. For a quieter evening, take a horse-drawn sleigh ride through the forest to a lavish dinner in a rustic cabin at Lone Mountain Ranch or explore the many restaurants and shops in Meadow and Mountain Villages.

Package Deals

Take advantage of tremendous values all season. "Biggest Skiing in America" packages offer an extra night of lodging and a free day of skiing.

For more information visit
BiggestSkiingInAmerica.com.

BIGGEST SKIING IN AMERICA



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How far would you go for the skiing you've been missing? Not only do we offer more skiing than anywhere else in the United States, lift lines are conspicuously absent, the staff and service are beyond extraordinary – and Yellowstone National Park is in our own backyard, just a snowmobile ride away. This season, go farther than you've gone before. After you've experienced the Biggest Skiing in America, nothing else can compare.

Book any Biggest Skiing in America package online at www.BiggestSkiingInAmerica.com and get an **extra night's lodging and lift ticket FREE!***

Kids 10 and under always ski FREE!

*Restrictions apply. Based on availability.



THE LONG WEEKEND



A Real-Life Roman Holiday

Truly tiny, this magical Italian village was almost history. By DAVID FARLEY

There are many reasons why Calcata—a village of 80 full-time residents tucked into the hills about 30 miles north of Rome—is a favorite weekend destination for denizens of the Eternal City. Sitting atop 450-foot-high cliffs in the middle of a verdant valley, Calcata's mosaic of houses, petite castle tower, and classic campanile are constructed of the same tan-colored volcanic rock on which the village itself sits—or, rather, perches. Narrow, pedestrians-only streets, made up of chunky river rock, weave throughout the village, no larger than half a football field. And caves at the base



Glimpses of Calcata reveal seductive authenticity: a quiet village invitingly perched (top).

MARCO LAVAGNINI (UPPER), JOCHEM WIJNANDS/ALAMY (LOWER)



A Caffè Kaffir fresco sets the mood. Walk Calcata's cobblestones and enter a timeless realm (right). Pancho Garrison serves loved-by-locals fare in mosaic-lined Grotta dei Germogli (below).



of the town date back centuries, to Etruscan times. Imagine something straight from the imagination of Tolkien.

But Calcata's real attraction is the colorful residents who saved the town. After the Italian government condemned Calcata (for fear its cliffs were crumbling), a new village was built a half mile away, and, by the late 1960s, a majority of Calcata's inhabitants had migrated there while the medieval village awaited a government wrecking crew. That's when artists and hippies started turning up, buying the empty apartments on the cheap. They opened art galleries, shops that sell handmade clothing, restaurants, and cafés. They put on plays and had parties in the piazza. And they eventually convinced the government to let the village live. Somehow, talk of "crumbling cliffs" ceased.

Today, if you linger around the intimate piazza long enough, you just might

meet some of these inhabitants. The roster includes celebrated architect Paolo Portoghesi, the American choreographer Paul Steffen, sculptor Costantino Morosin, and painters Giancarlo Croce and Romano Vitali. Start your art tour at the Palazzo Baronale, where a branch of the ruling Anguillara family resided during the Renaissance; it now acts as a venue for local art exhibitions (the interior space was recently redesigned by Portoghesi). Or see what's on at Il Granarone, a gallery and café run by Dutch marionette maker Marijcke van der Maden. And when all this art gawking builds up an appetite, stop by the mosaic-adorned Grotta dei Germogli, an avant-garde cave space where the American-born chef (and, yes, mosaic artist) Pancho Garrison dishes up fare with global flair (his twist on gnocchi: a tomato sauce with coconut milk). As for a place to spend the night, I Sensi della Terra—with a photo-filled website—arranges for surprisingly affordable rooms and apartments, which are sprinkled throughout the village.

LOGISTICS: About 30 miles north of Rome, Calcata is an easy drive once you get outside town. Also good: Hop on one of the blue CO-TRAL buses at outer Rome's Saxa Rubra bus station. Il Granarone, www.ilgranarone.com. Grotta dei Germogli, www.grottadeigermogli.org. I Sensi della Terra, www.isensidellaterra.it, rooms and apartments, from \$60.



■ USA/SOUTH

Keys Gone Wild

Many visitors zip through Florida's Lower Keys with one thought in mind: "Margaritaville, here we come!" But the islets closest to Key West offer a more authentic taste of Florida Wild. On the bay side of Sugarloaf Key, paddlers navigate skinny passages under a canopy of black, white, and red mangroves. Creatures as bizarre as anything at Key West's Fantasy Fest cavort in the sea grass beds. Watch for nurse sharks, rays, and pickle-like sea cucumbers that shoot out their intestines at predators and then grow new ones. Hook up with a kayak guide to admire an ecosystem that existed long before Jimmy Buffett.

Five miles out to sea, at Looe Key, coral rises from depths of 35 feet. Purple sea fans sway with the rhythms of the ocean, revealing multicolored swirls of parrotfish and the occasional barracuda. Strike Zone Charters offers half-day trips to Looe Key marine reserve. (Tip: Sign up for the 9:30 a.m. dive/snorkel trip—it's the one least likely to be cancelled due to bad weather.)

Overnight on the Keys' most luscious beach. Palm-fringed Bahia Honda State Park offers oceanfront campsites and bay-side cabins. Or try family-run Big Pine Key Fishing Lodge. Everybody shows up for eats (like sauteed grouper with Key lime tartar sauce) at the Square Grouper Bar & Grill ("square grouper" refers to the bales of marijuana dumped into the ocean by law-evading drug runners). So very Keys! On to Key West? Tomorrow. Maybe.

—DIANE BLAIR AND PAMELA WRIGHT

LOGISTICS: Fly to Key West or Miami, then drive 30 or 120 miles, respectively. Lazy Dog Island Outfitters, www.lazydog.com. Strike Zone Charters, 800-654-9560. Bahia Honda State Park, camping \$36/cabin \$120; www.reserveamerica.com. Big Pine Key Fishing Lodge, camping \$37/rooms from \$109; 305-872-2351. Square Grouper Bar & Grill, 305-745-8880.



In the orange light of dusk, a great white heron surveys the quietly lush Keys scene.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRIS WARD/JONES/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; ANDREA RESCIGNO/ALAMY; ANGIE CHESTNUT; CHRIS WARD/JONES/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Washington, D.C. Welcomes Weekend Warriors

The nation's capital has joined with National Geographic to welcome *Terra Cotta Warriors*—and you—to the city. Washington, D.C. invites you to become a “weekend warrior” and enjoy the many events going on around the city in honor of this exhibit. At the Smithsonian's renowned **Sackler Gallery**, you can take a tour of remarkable pieces in the Chinese collection. Or visit the **Folger Shakespeare Library's** special exhibit *Imagining China: The View from Europe, 1550–1700* to learn how trade and travel during that period shaped the European understanding of Asia. To savor the cuisine of Xi'an, home city of the warriors, stop by **Mie N Yu**, or enjoy a Chinese-inspired tea at the legendary **Willard Hotel**.

As the holiday season unfolds in

the capital city, so too do its beloved traditions: Handel's *Messiah* at the **Washington National Cathedral**, *A Christmas Carol* at **Ford's Theatre**, the **Washington Ballet's** *Nutcracker* at the **Warner Theatre**, and the National Christmas Tree and the National Menorah on the **White House Ellipse**.

To make your visit pleasurable and affordable, historic Loews' **Madison Hotel**, the **National Geographic Museum's** official hotel partner for the *Terra Cotta Warriors*, is conveniently located two blocks away and is offering special packages that include two any-time tickets to the exhibit. For more China-themed events, and to explore all that's happening in Washington, D.C. this winter, go to weekendwarriorsdc.com.



BE A WEEKEND WARRIOR



Power-packed weekends begin at **WASHINGTON.ORG**

Check out engaging exhibitions, inspiring events and powerful deals for Weekend Warriors in DC this fall. Score exclusive any day, any time tickets to catch the *Terra Cotta Warriors* exhibition at the National Geographic Museum when you book your hotel stay at **WASHINGTON.ORG**.

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A Spectacular Time to Visit a Spectacular City



This winter, Washington, D.C. and the National Geographic Museum bring you the warriors of an ancient tradition and the beloved traditions of a holiday season.

How often do you have the privilege of gazing into the haunted eyes of warriors more than 2,000 years old?

Now you have that privilege. Beginning November 19th, the **National Geographic Museum** in Washington, D.C. will host *Terra Cotta Warriors: Guardians of China's First Emperor*. Fifteen of these amazing life-size figures—the largest number ever to tour the U.S.—will make their only appearance in the Northeast, the final stop on a groundbreaking tour of America. Along with the terra cotta figures, you'll see weapons, armor, coins, and other treasures from the emperor's massive tomb complex, which covers more than 19 square miles. The exhibit is sure to leave you with a lasting memory of the might and majesty of ancient China.

For an astonishing 2,200 years the

warriors stood armored and ready for battle in vast pits, guarding the first Emperor Qin Shihuangdi—the great one who unified the “Warring States” and set China on the path to its destiny. Qin's underground army might have remained buried forever had not farmers, drilling a well in 1974, unearthed a strange, terra cotta head outside the city of Xi'an in Shaanxi Province. Archaeologists soon arrived, and the excavations they began 35 years ago still continue. It is estimated that thousands more of these life-size figures—charioteers, horses, acrobats, musicians, and officials, each with his own eternal expression—are still waiting underground, ready to serve their emperor in the afterlife.

Commune with these ancient men of terra cotta, and you'll feel it yourself—the glory and pathos of each warrior's past.

Terra Cotta Warriors: Guardians of China's First Emperor will be on exhibit November 19, 2009 to March 31, 2010 at the **National Geographic Museum**, 1145 17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. To learn more about ongoing archaeological research and the latest imaging techniques, see the hour-long documentary *The Real Dragon Emperor*, in **National Geographic's Grosvenor Auditorium**.

For tickets, hours, and information on the exhibit and film, go to warriorsdc.org.



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Subject to availability. Valid through 3/31/10. Restrictions apply. For full terms and conditions, visit loewshotels.com/terracotta.

www.journal-plaza.net & www.freedowns.net



■ USA/NORTHWEST

Fall Salmon Spectacular

Every autumn in Washington State streams flowing into **Puget Sound** host the climax of one of nature's greatest migrations: Thousands of chum salmon

come home to spawn. Born in those very streams a few years before, the salmon migrate to the Pacific Ocean to mature, then return to start the next generation. Although they die after depositing and



Come fall, fat chum salmon can be spotted from the leafy Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail (left).

fertilizing their eggs, their bodies are rich with food from the ocean—fine nourishment for eagles, bears, and gulls.

The Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail offers a rare opportunity to witness this spectacle. Operated by the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, the secluded trail is open weekends in November. Guides and interpretive signage tell the salmon story, and observation platforms enhance viewing. Nearby, the Kennedy Creek Natural Area Preserve showcases Puget Sound estuary habitat, with shorebirds, waterfowl, and migrating salmon. The Squaxin Island Tribe shares its story at the Museum Library and Research Center. Exhibits of baskets and other artifacts tell of the tribe's long relationship with Puget Sound. A 25-minute drive south, in Olympia, check into the Lighthouse Bungalow, snug on the shore of Puget Sound and a stone's throw from downtown. Kayaks and bicycles are available. Ramblin Jacks offers savory meals cooked from scratch in a wood-fired oven and barbecue smoker. Next morning, walk the shore to the Olympia Farmers Market for seafood, farm produce, jams and jellies, and high-quality crafts. Batdorf & Bronson's renowned coffee is roasted right next to the market. Tours are offered, and sipping coffee in one of their Dancing Goats locations is a great way to end a November stay on a warm note.

—SHELLEY KIRK-RUDEEN

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LOGISTICS: Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail, www.spsseg.org. Kennedy Creek Natural Area Preserve, www.dnr.wa.gov/AboutDNR/ManagedLands/Pages/amp_na_Kennedy.aspx. Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, www.squaxinlandmuseum.org. Lighthouse Bungalow, from \$175, www.lighthousebungalow.com. Ramblin Jacks, www.ramblinjacks.com. Olympia Farmers Market, www.olympiafarmersmarket.com. Batdorf & Bronson Coffee, www.dancinggoats.com.

Around Antietam

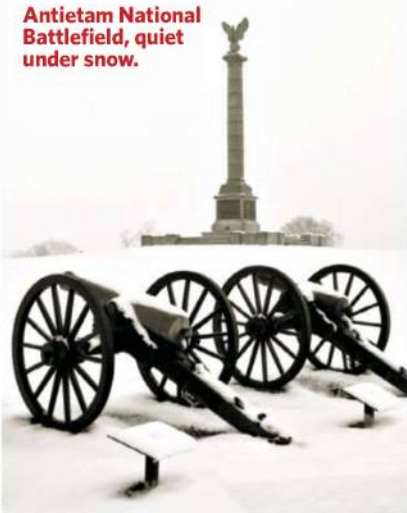
Established in 1776 and named for Gen. George Washington, 458-square-mile **Washington County, Maryland**, is—no surprise—pure Americana. Its road, canal, and railroad furthered westward expansion. Numerous parks provide green space along with hiking, biking, fishing, and canoeing during three seasons. And in the winter, on December's first Saturday, Antietam National Battlefield glows with 23,110 luminaria that honor Union and Confederate casualties of the bloodiest one-day battle in American history.

In Hagerstown, county seat and Civil War supply center, the Hager House and Museum's period furnishings and tools illustrate frontier life. Antique-hunt in Funkstown: Hudson House Galleries trades in museum-quality pieces; Valley Antiques, a collection of dealers, offers an eclectic mix of merchandise.

At the end of the day, chain hotels like Hilton's Homewood Suites provide full service at low prices. Small town Boonsboro boasts the area's only boutique hotel. Novelist Nora Roberts's Inn BoonsBoro inhabits a 1790s stone building. Duffy's on Potomac serves modern American fare in a sleek space. Picnic provisions and regional crafts are sold at Hagerstown's Farmers Market. In Boonsboro, Crawford Confectionery sells candy, but lunch counter gossip is free. —ANN COCHRAN

LOGISTICS: Washington County, www.marylandmemories.org, is a 90-minute drive from Washington, D.C. Inn BoonsBoro, from \$220, www.innboonsboro.com; Hilton Homewood Suites, from \$109, www.homewoodsuites.com. Antietam National Battlefield, www.nps.gov/anti/planyourvisit.htm. Duffy's on Potomac, www.duffysonpotomac.com.

Antietam National Battlefield, quiet under snow.

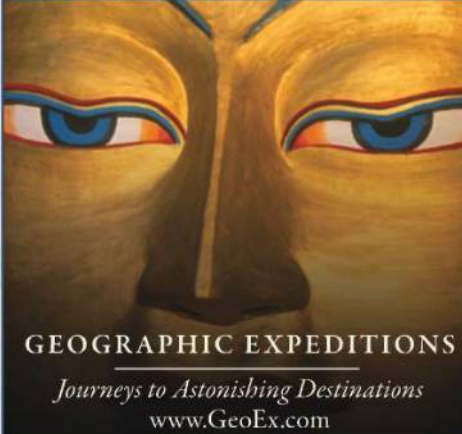


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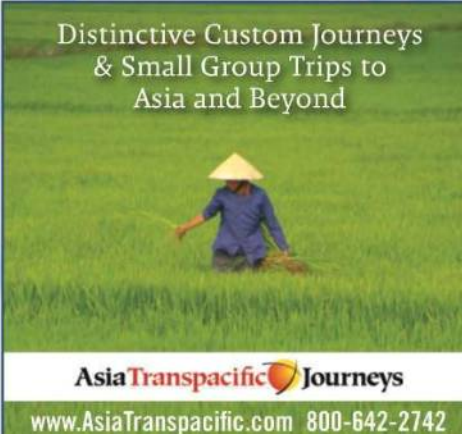
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Big fun—all morning long—can be had at the zydeco breakfast (left) at Café Des Amis. Don't miss the Atchafalaya Swamp Tour (above).

you'll be in your chair for long.

In historic Lafayette, almost every building was formerly something else, including the Juliet Boutique Hotel, formerly the Parisienne Department Store. Lafayette is also one of the most culturally unique cities in the South, with world-class museums and galleries. Truly one of a kind is Vermilionville, a Cajun/Creole heritage and folklife park with restored historic homes, live Cajun and zydeco music, and cooking classes where you can learn how to make—among other local temptations—beignets (those addictive sans-hole donuts).

Stroll the grounds of the Univer-

FROM LEFT: FRITS WEST/ADVENTURETRAVEL.COM, KELLY WESTHOFF

■ USA/SOUTH

Good Time Louisiana

In and around the city of **Lafayette**, about 35 miles west of Baton Rouge, there's knee-slappin' music from morning till night, all year long. Begin your Saturday in the town of

Breaux Bridge with the get-up-and-dance zydeco breakfast at Café Des Amis (which started as a general merchandise store in 1890). Get there by 7:30 a.m., and you still could wait an hour to be seated. Not that

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sity of Louisiana at Lafayette, which claims to be the only college in the United States with an alligator-filled swamp, then head to Borden's Ice Cream Shoppe for a sundae—it's the only Borden's left in the U.S. Sign up for the Atchafalaya Swamp Tour (yes, more alligators), which commences at McGee's

Landing. Return to McGee's Café for live music and Cajun fare: crawfish étouffée, seafood gumbo, and—surprise—alligator.

And there's more. Have your music and eat it too at the Blue Dog. Soak up the sauce and kick up your heels at Randol's Restaurant & Cajun Dancehall—a former greenhouse. —MARGIE GOLDSMITH

LOGISTICS: Fly to Lafayette Regional Airport or drive 2.5 hours west from New Orleans. Café Des Amis, www.cafedesamis.com. Vermilionville, www.vermilionville.org. Blue Dog Café, www.bluedogcafe.com. Randol's Restaurant & Cajun Dancehall, www.randols.com. Borden's Ice Cream Shoppe, 337-235-9291. McGee's Landing Swamp Tours & Café, www.mcgeeslanding.com. Juliet Boutique Hotel, from \$149, www.juliethotel.com.

■ USA/MIDWEST

A Winter Fling in Little Yellow Springs

Home to roughly 4,000, **Yellow Springs, Ohio**, boasts a disproportionate number of creative types, a legacy of liberal arts Antioch College, the cornerstone for more than 150 years, before it closed in 2008 due to low enrollment. Every third Friday, "Fling in the Springs" showcases the local creativity—from paintings to twirling fire dancers—in a five-mile radius of town. Start at Lisa Goldberg Ceramics, with travel-inspired ceremonial masks. Visit Pam Geisel's studio for unconventional quilts. Back at the village center, peek into the Village

Artisan shops on Corry Street.

Have dinner at the Winds Cafe & Bakery. Opt for the local favorite: pan-fried walleye. This Lake Erie fish is coated with cornmeal and served with a succotash of lima beans, green beans, and corn—locally grown.

"I was a 'big city' girl and had no idea what country life was like," says Donna McGovern, who runs Grinnell Mill, a bed & breakfast (and oh what a breakfast!) repurposed from a water-powered gristmill built in 1813 and teeming with antique furniture. "The help of the community, through donations and



Ratatouille crepes with tapenade and goat cheese at Winds Cafe.

hard work, restored this mill." Feel like a kid again at Young's Jersey Dairy. Dig into their decadent homemade ice cream and try their seasonal "flavor of the week"—egg nog and peppermint

stick are classic winter favorites.

What does the future hold for this Midwest oasis? Word has it that some Antioch College alumni have joined forces in hopes of reopening the school in 2011. Stay tuned. —LOLA AKINMADE

LOGISTICS: Yellow Springs is about a 60-minute drive from Columbus; 30 minutes from Dayton. Studios/galleries, www.ysarts.org. Artisan Village, www.shopvillageartisans.com. Winds Cafe & Bakery, www.windscafe.com. Young's Jersey Dairy, www.youngsdairy.com. Grinnell Mill, from \$105, www.grinnellmill.com.

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Sinking feeling: Lady Liberty (*above*) appears to peek from frozen Lake Mendota beside the campus of the University of Wisconsin–Madison; the reproduction is placed on the ice some years for the Hoofers Winter Carnival. **Not on the White House tour:** America's sixth President, John Quincy Adams, kept an alligator in the White House for a short time, a gift from the Marquis de Lafayette. **Whose came first?** The original decorated Christmas tree may have been erected in Riga, Latvia, in 1510...or in Tallinn, Estonia, in 1441. No one knows for sure, though both cities now hold traditional Christmas markets in their Old Town sections. **Big blue:** The Star of India, the largest star sapphire in the world at 563 carats, was discovered in Sri Lanka; the blue stone is one of the most famous objects in New York's American Museum of Natural History. **China calamity:** The deadliest recorded earthquake struck central China's Shaanxi Province in 1556, killing some 830,000 people. **No bans sans pants:** Urban legend holds that Finland banned Donald Duck in 1977 because the cartoon character doesn't wear pants; truth is, budget cuts in Helsinki halted the purchase of comic books for youth centers. **We eat, they shop:** According to the U.S. Travel Association, dining is the most popular activity for domestic travelers, while shopping tops the list for foreign visitors to the U.S. **A Fistful of...Obols?** The name for the old Greek drachma coin comes from the verb meaning "to grasp"; originally, a drachma equaled a fistful of silver coins called obols, each worth a sixth of a drachma.

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